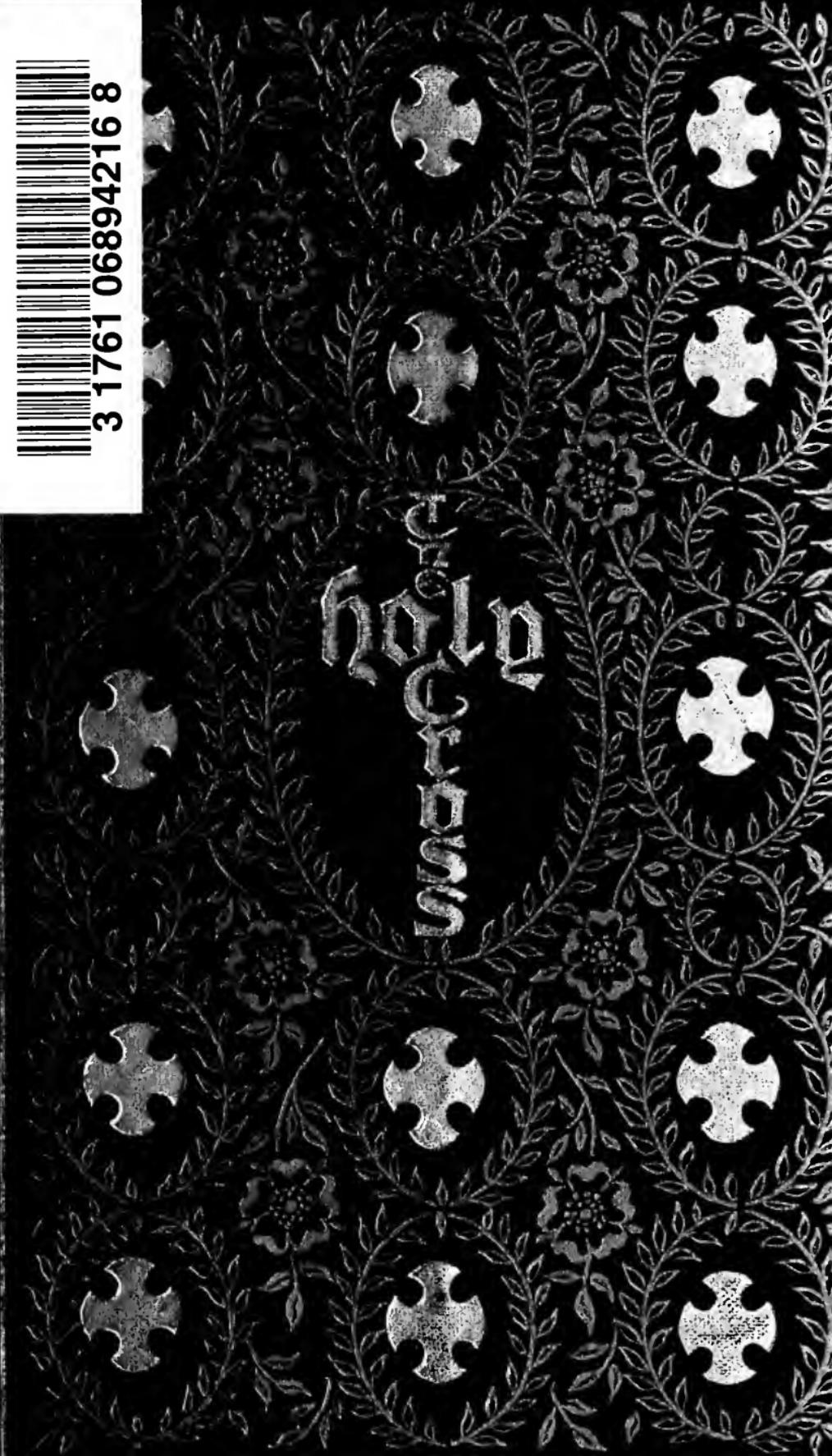


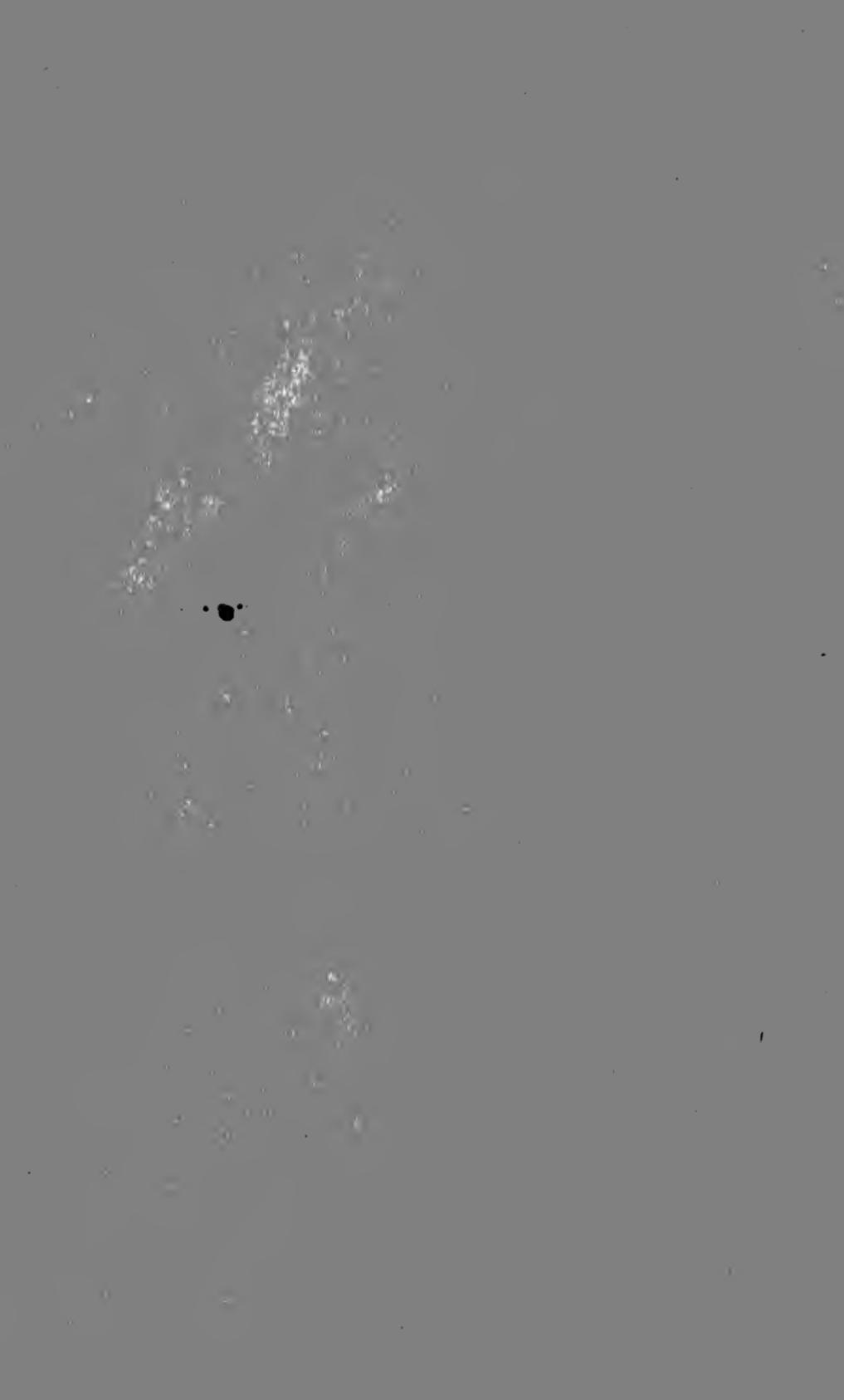


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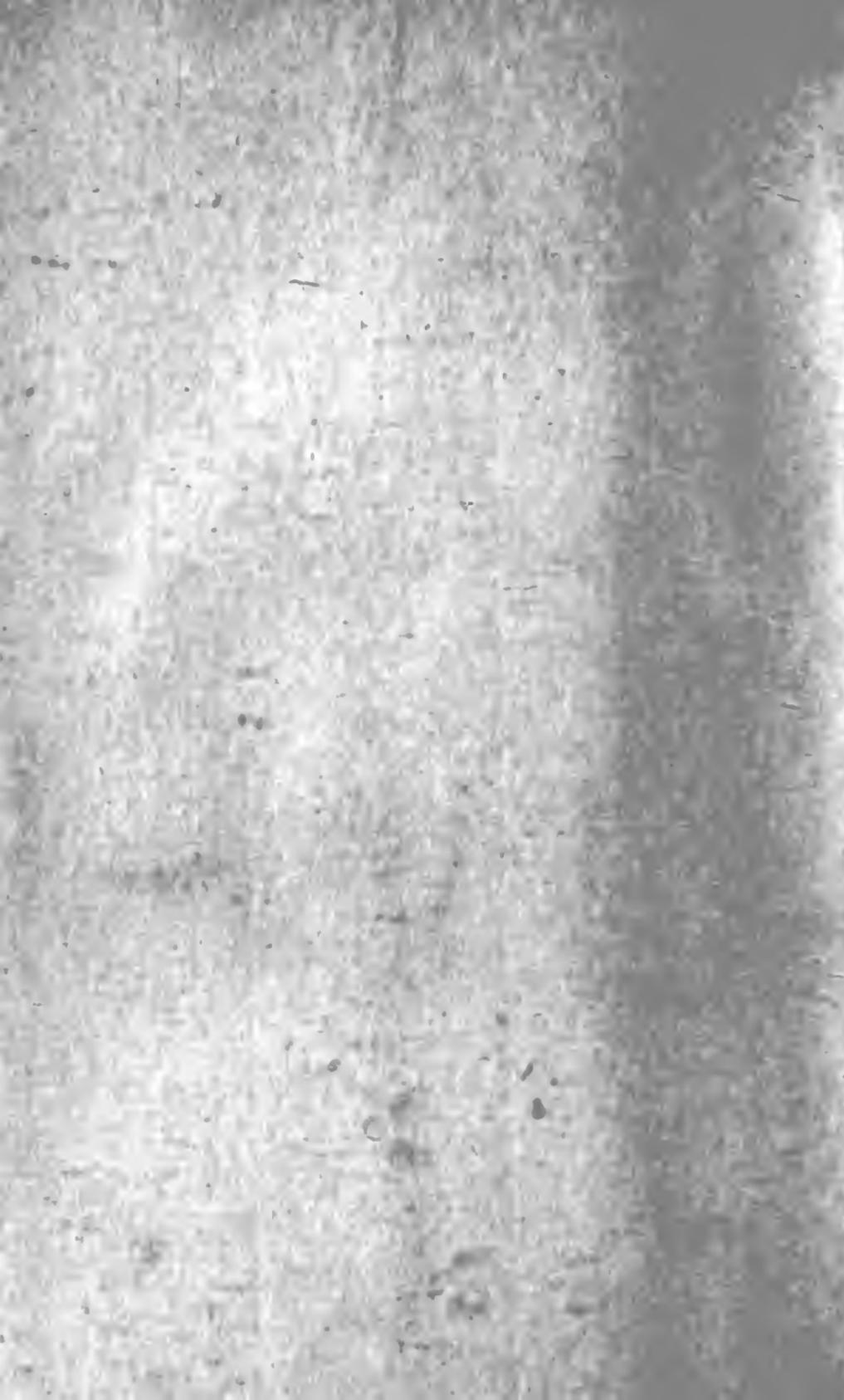
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The Holp Cross and Other Tales



The Holy
Cross
and other
tales
by

Eugene Field

Stone & Kimball
Cambridge & Chicago

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DEDICATED,

WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE,

TO

ROSWELL MARTIN FIELD.



CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THE HOLY CROSS	13
II. THE ROSE AND THE THRUSH	36
III. THE SEAL-WIFE	50
IV. FLAIL, TRASK, AND BISLAND	84
V. THE TOUCH IN THE HEART.	96
VI. DANIEL AND THE DEVIL	114
VII. METHUSELAH	131
VIII. FÉLICE AND PETIT-POULAIN	148
IX. THE RIVER	161
X. FRANZ ABT	166
XI. MISTRESS MERCILESS	173



I.

THE HOLY CROSS.



HILST the noble Don Esclevador and his little band of venturesome followers explored the neighboring fastnesses in quest for gold, the Father Miguel tarried at the shrine which in

sweet piety they had hewn out of the stubborn rock in that strangely desolate spot. Here, upon that serene August morning, the holy Father held communion with the saints, beseeching them, in all humility, to intercede with our beloved Mother for the safe guidance of the fugitive Cortes to his native shores, and for the divine protection of the little host, which, separated from the Spanish

army, had wandered leagues to the northward, and had sought refuge in the noble mountains of an unknown land. The Father's devotions were, upon a sudden, interrupted by the approach of an aged man who toiled along the mountain-side path,— a man so aged and so bowed and so feeble that he seemed to have been brought down into that place, by means of some necromantic art, out of distant centuries. His face was yellow and wrinkled like ancient parchment, and a beard whiter than Samite streamed upon his breast, whilst about his withered body and shrunken legs hung faded raiment which the elements had corroded and the thorns had grievously rent. And as he toiled along, the aged man continually groaned, and continually wrung his palsied hands, as if a sorrow, no lighter than his years, afflicted him.

“ In whose name comest thou? ” demanded the Father Miguel, advancing a space toward the stranger, but not in threatening wise; whereat the aged man stopped in his course

and lifted his eyebrows, and regarded the Father a goodly time, but he spake no word.

“In whose name comest thou?” repeated the priestly man. “Upon these mountains have we lifted up the cross of our blessed Lord in the name of our sovereign liege, and here have we set down a tabernacle to the glory of the Virgin and of her ever-blessed son, our Redeemer and thine,—whoso thou mayest be!”

“Who is thy king I know not,” quoth the aged man, feebly; “but the shrine in yonder wall of rock I know; and by that symbol which I see therein, and by thy faith for which it stands, I conjure thee, as thou lovest both, give me somewhat to eat and to drink, that betimes I may go upon my way again, for the journey before me is a long one.”

These words spake the old man in tones of such exceeding sadness that the Father Miguel, touched by compassion, hastened to meet the wayfarer, and, with his arms

about him, and with whisperings of sweet comfort, to conduct him to a resting-place. Coarse food in goodly plenty was at hand; and it happily fortuned, too, that there was a homely wine, made by Pietro del y Saguache himself, of the wild grapes in which a neighboring valley abounded. Of these things anon the old man partook, greedily but silently, and all that while he rolled his eyes upon the shrine; and then at last, struggling to his feet, he made as if to go upon his way.

“Nay,” interposed the Father Miguel, kindly; “abide with us a season. Thou art an old man and sorely spent. Such as we have thou shalt have, and if thy soul be distressed, we shall pour upon it the healing balm of our blessed faith.”

“Little knowest thou whereof thou speakest,” quoth the old man, sadly. “There is no balm can avail me. I prithee let me go hence, ere knowing what manner of man I am thou hatest me and doest evil unto me.” But as he said these words he fell back

again even then into the seat where he had sat, and, as through fatigue, his hoary head drooped upon his bosom.

“Thou art ill!” cried the Father Miguel, hastening to his side. “Thou shalt go no farther this day! Give me thy staff,”—and he plucked it from him.

Then said the old man: “As I am now, so have I been these many hundred years. Thou hast heard tell of me,—canst thou not guess my name; canst thou not read my sorrow in my face and in my bosom? As thou art good and holy through thy faith in that symbol in yonder shrine, hearken to me, for I will tell thee of the wretch whom thou hast succored. Then, if it be thy will, give me thy curse and send me on my way.”

Much marvelled the Father Miguel at these words, and he deemed the old man to be mad; but he made no answer. And presently the old man, bowing his head upon his hands, had to say in this wise:—

“Upon a time,” he quoth, “I abided in

the city of the Great King,— there was I born and there I abided. I was of good stature, and I asked favor of none. I was an artisan, and many came to my shop, and my cunning was sought of many,— for I was exceeding crafty in my trade; and so, therefore, speedily my pride begot an insolence that had respect to none at all. And once I heard a tumult in the street, as of the cries of men and boys commingled, and the clashing of arms and staves. Seeking to know the cause thereof, I saw that one was being driven to execution,— one that had said he was the Son of God and the King of the Jews, for which blasphemy and crime against our people he was to die upon the cross. Overcome by the weight of this cross, which he bore upon his shoulders, the victim tottered in the street and swayed this way and that, as though each moment he were like to fall, and he groaned in sore agony. Meanwhile about him pressed a multitude that with vast clamor railed at him and scoffed him and smote him, to whom he

paid no heed; but in his agony his eyes were alway uplifted to heaven, and his lips moved in prayer for them that so shamefully entreated him. And as he went his way to Calvary, it fortuned that he fell and lay beneath the cross right at my very door, whereupon, turning his eyes upon me as I stood over against him, he begged me that for a little moment I should bear up the weight of the cross whilst that he wiped the sweat from off his brow. But I was filled with hatred, and I spurned him with my foot, and I said to him: ‘Move on, thou wretched criminal, move on. Pollute not my doorway with thy touch,—move on to death, I command thee!’ This was the answer I gave to him, but no succor at all. Then he spake to me once again, and he said: ‘Thou, too, shalt move on, O Jew! Thou shalt move on forever, but not to death!’ And with these words he bore up the cross again and went upon his way to Calvary.

“Then of a sudden,” quoth the old man, “a horror filled my breast, and a resistless

terror possessed me. So was I accursed forevermore. A voice kept saying always to me: 'Move on, O Jew! move on forever!' From home, from kin, from country, from all I knew and loved I fled; nowhere could I tarry, — the nameless horror burned in my bosom, and I heard continually a voice crying unto me: 'Move on, O Jew! move on forever!' So, with the years, the centuries, the ages, I have fled before that cry and in that nameless horror; empires have risen and crumbled, races have been born and are extinct, mountains have been cast up and time hath levelled them, — still I do live and still I wander hither and thither upon the face of the earth, and am an accursed thing. The gift of tongues is mine, — all men I know, yet mankind knows me not. Death meets me face to face, and passes me by; the sea devours all other prey, but will not hide me in its depths; wild beasts flee from me, and pestilences turn their consuming breaths elsewhere. On and on and on I go, — not to a home, nor to my people, nor to my

grave, but evermore into the tortures of an eternity of sorrow. And evermore I feel the nameless horror burn within, whilst evermore I see the pleading eyes of him that bore the cross, and evermore I hear his voice crying: 'Move on, O Jew ! move on forevermore !'"

"Thou art the Wandering Jew !" cried the Father Miguel.

"I am he," saith the aged man. "I marvel not that thou dost revolt against me, for thou standest in the shadow of that same cross which I have spurned, and thou art illumined with the love of him that went his way to Calvary. But I beseech thee bear with me until I have told thee all, — then drive me hence if thou art so minded."

"Speak on," quoth the Father Miguel.

Then said the Jew: "How came I here I scarcely know; the seasons are one to me, and one day but as another; for the span of my life, O priestly man ! is eternity. This much know you: from a far country I embarked upon a ship, — I knew not whence 'twas bound, nor cared I. I obeyed the voice

that bade me go. Anon a mighty tempest fell upon the ship and overwhelmed it. The cruel sea brought peace to all but me ; a many days it tossed and buffeted me, then with a cry of exultation cast me at last upon a shore I had not seen before, a coast far, far westward whereon abides no human thing. But in that solitude still heard I from within the awful mandate that sent me journeying onward, ‘Move on, O Jew ! move on ;’ and into vast forests I plunged, and mighty plains I traversed ; onward, onward, onward I went, with the nameless horror in my bosom, and — that cry, that awful cry ! The rains beat upon me ; the sun wrought pitilessly with me ; the thickets tore my flesh ; and the inhospitable shores bruised my weary feet, — yet onward I went, plucking what food I might from thorny bushes to stay my hunger, and allaying my feverish thirst at pools where reptiles crawled. Sometimes a monster beast stood in my pathway and threatened to devour me ; then would I spread my two arms thus, and welcome death,

crying: 'Rend thou this Jew in twain, O beast! strike thy kindly fangs deep into this heart,— be not afeard, for I shall make no battle with thee, nor any outcry whatsoever!' But, lo, the beast would cower before me and skulk away. So there is no death for me; the judgment spoken is irrevocable; my sin is unpardonable, and the voice will not be hushed!"

Thus and so much spake the Jew, bowing his hoary head upon his hands. Then was the Father Miguel vastly troubled; yet he recoiled not from the Jew,— nay, he took the old man by the hand and sought to soothe him.

"Thy sin was most heinous, O Jew!" quoth the Father; "but it falleth in our blessed faith to know that whoso repenteth of his sin, what it soever may be, the same shall surely be forgiven. Thy punishment hath already been severe, and God is merciful, for even as we are all his children, even so his tenderness to us is like unto the tenderness of a father unto his child — yea, and infi-

nately tenderer and sweeter, for who can estimate the love of our heavenly Father? Thou didst deny thy succor to the Nazarene when he besought it, yet so great compassion hath he that if thou but callest upon him he will forget thy wrong,—leastwise will pardon it. Therefore be thou persuaded by me, and tarry here this night, that in the presence of yonder symbol and the holy relics our prayers may go up with thine unto our blessed Mother and to the saints who haply shall intercede for thee in Paradise. Rest here, O sufferer,—rest thou here, and we shall presently give thee great comfort."

The Jew, well-nigh fainting with fatigue, being persuaded by the holy Father's gentle words, gave finally his consent unto this thing, and went anon unto the cave beyond the shrine, and entered thereinto, and lay upon a bed of skins and furs, and made as if to sleep. And when he slept his sleep was seemingly disturbed by visions, and he tossed as doth an one that sees full evil things, and in that sleep he muttered somewhat of a

voice he seemed to hear, though round about there was no sound whatsoever, save only the soft music of the pine-trees on the mountain-side. Meanwhile in the shrine, hewn out of those rocks, did the Father Miguel bow before the sacred symbol of his faith and plead for mercy for that same Jew that slumbered anear. And when, as the deepening blue mantle of night fell upon the hill-tops and obscured the valleys round about, Don Esclevador and his sturdy men came clamoring along the mountain-side, the holy Father met them a way off and bade them have regard to the aged man that slept in yonder cave. But when he told them of that Jew and of his misery and of the secret causes thereof, out spake the noble Don Esclevador, full hotly,—

“By our sweet Christ,” he cried, “shall we not offend our blessed faith and do most impiously in the Virgin’s sight if we give this harbor and this succor unto so vile a sinner as this Jew that hath denied our dear Lord !”

Which words had like to wrought great evil with the Jew, for instantly the other men sprang forward as if to awaken the Jew and drive him forth into the night. But the Father Miguel stretched forth his hands and commanded them to do no evil unto the Jew, and so persuasively did he set forth the godliness and the sweetness of compassion that presently the whole company was moved with a gentle pity toward that Jew. Therefore it befell anon, when night came down from the skies and after they had feasted upon their homely food as was their wont, that they talked of the Jew, and thinking of their own hardships and misfortunes (whereof it is not now to speak), they had all the more compassion to that Jew, which spake them passing fair, I ween.

Now all this while lay the Jew upon the bed of skins and furs within the cave, and though he slept (for he was exceeding weary), he tossed continually from side to side, and spoke things in his sleep, as if his heart were sorely troubled, and as if in his dreams he

beheld grievous things. And seeing the old man, and hearing his broken speech, the others moved softly hither and thither and made no noise soever lest they should awaken him. And many an one—yes, all that valiant company bowed down that night before the symbol in the shrine, and with sweet reverence called upon our blessed Virgin to plead in the cause of that wretched Jew. Then sleep came to all, and in dreams the noble Don Esclevador saw his sovereign liege, and kneeled before his throne, and heard his sovereign liege's gracious voice; in dreams the heartweary soldier sailed the blue waters of the Spanish main, and pressed his native shore, and beheld once again the lovelight in the dark eyes of her that awaited him; in dreams the mountain-pines were kissed of the singing winds, and murmured drowsily and tossed their arms as do little children that dream of their play; in dreams the Jew swayed hither and thither, scourged by that nameless horror in his bosom, and seeing the pleading eyes of our dying Master,

and hearing that awful mandate : “ Move on, O Jew ! move on forever ! ” So each slept and dreamed his dreams, — all slept but the Father Miguel, who alone throughout the night kneeled in the shrine and called unto the saints and unto our Mother Mary in prayer. And his supplication was for that Jew ; and the mists fell upon that place and compassed it about, and it was as if the heavens had reached down their lips to kiss the holy shrine. And suddenly there came unto the Jew a quiet as of death, so that he tossed no more in his sleep and spake no word, but lay exceeding still, smiling in his sleep as one who sees his home in dreams, or his mother, or some other such beloved thing.

It came to pass that early in the morning the Jew came from the cavern to go upon his way, and the Father Miguel besought him to take with him a goodly loaf in his wallet as wise provision against hunger. But the Jew denied this, and then he said : “ Last night while I slept methought I stood

once more in the city of the Great King,—aye, in that very doorway where I stood, swart and lusty, when I spurned him that went his way to Calvary. In my bosom burned the terror as of old, and my soul was consumed of a mighty anguish. None of those that passed in that street knew me; centuries had ground to dust all my kin. ‘O God!’ I cried in agony, ‘suffer my sin to be forgotten,—suffer me to sleep, to sleep forever beneath the burden of the cross I some time spurned!’ As I spake these words there stood before me one in shining raiment, and lo! ‘twas he who bore the cross to Calvary! His eyes that had pleaded to me on a time now fell compassionately upon me, and the voice that had commanded me move on forever, now broke full sweetly on my ears: ‘Thou shalt go on no more, O Jew, but as thou hast asked, so shall it be, and thou shalt sleep forever beneath the cross.’ Then fell I into a deep slumber, and, therefrom but just now awaking, I feel within me what peace bespeaketh

pardon for my sin. This day am I ransomed; so suffer me to go my way, O holy man."

So went the Jew upon his way, not groaningly and in toilsomewise, as was his wont, but eagerly, as goeth one to meet his bride, or unto some sweet reward. And the Father Miguel stood long, looking after him and being sorely troubled in mind; for he knew not what interpretation he should make of all these things. And anon the Jew was lost to sight in the forest.

But once, a little space thereafter, while that José Conejos, the Castilian, clambered up the yonder mountain-side, he saw amid the grasses there the dead and withered body of an aged man, and thereupon forthwith made he such clamor that Don Esclevador hastened thither and saw it was the Jew; and since there was no sign that wild beasts had wrought evil with him, it was declared that the Jew had died of age and fatigue and sorrow, albeit on the wrinkled face there was a smile of peace that none had

seen thereon while yet the Jew lived. And it was accounted to be a most wondrous thing that, whereas never before had flowers of that kind been seen in those mountains, there now bloomed all round about flowers of the dye of blood, which thing the noble Don Esclevador took full wisely to be a symbol of our dear Lord's most precious blood, whereby not only you and me but even the Jew shall be redeemed to Paradise.

Within the spot where they had found the Jew they buried him, and there he sleeps unto this very day. Above the grave the Father Miguel said a prayer; and the ground of that mountain they adjudged to be holy ground; but over the grave wherein lay the Jew they set up neither cross nor symbol of any kind, fearing to offend their holy faith.

But that very night, when that they were returned unto their camp half a league distant, there arose a mighty tempest, and there was such an upheaval and rending of the earth as only God's hand could make; and there was a crashing and a groaning as if

the world were smitten in twain, and the winds fled through the valleys in dismay, and the trees of the forest shrieked in terror and fell upon their faces. Then in the morning when the tempest ceased and all the sky was calm and radiant they saw that an impassable chasm lay between them and that mountain-side wherein the Jew slept the sleep of death; that God had traced with his finger a mighty gulf about that holy ground which held the bones of the transgressor. Between heaven and earth hung that lonely grave, nor could any foot scale the precipice that guarded it; but one might see that the spot was beautiful with kindly mountain verdure and that flowers of blood-red dye bloomed in that lonely place.

This was the happening in a summer-time a many years ago; to the mellow grace of that summer succeeded the purple glory of the autumn, and then came on apace the hoary dignity of winter. But the earth hath its resurrection too, and anon came the beau-

teous spring-time with warmth and scents and new life. The brooks leapt forth once more from their hiding-places, the verdure awaked, and the trees put forth their foliage. Then from the awful mountain peaks the snow silently and slowly slipped to the valleys, and in divers natural channels went onward and ever downward to the southern sea, and now at last 'twas summer-time again and the mellow grace of August brooded over the earth. But in that yonder mountain-side had fallen a symbol never to be removed, — aye, upon that holy ground where slept the Jew was stretched a cross, a mighty cross of snow on which the sun never fell and which no breath of wind ever disturbed. Elsewhere was the tender warmth of verdure and the sacred passion of the blood-red flowers, but over that lonely grave was stretched the symbol of him that went his way to Calvary, and in that grave slept the Jew.

Mightily marvelled Don Esclevador and his warrior host at this thing; but the Father

Miguel knew its meaning; for he was minded of that vision wherein it was foretold unto the Jew that, pardoned for his sin, he should sleep forever under the burden of the cross he spurned. All this the Father Miguel showed unto Don Esclevador and the others, and he said: "I deem that unto all ages this holy symbol shall bear witness of our dear Christ's mercy and compassion. Though we, O exiled brothers, sleep in this foreign land in graves which none shall know, upon that mountain height beyond shall stretch the eternal witness to our faith and to our Redeemer's love, minding all that look thereon, not of the pains and the punishments of the Jew, but of the exceeding mercy of our blessed Lord, and of the certain eternal peace that cometh through his love!"

How long ago these things whereof I speak befell, I shall not say. They never saw — that Spanish host — they never saw their native land, their sovereign liege, their loved ones' faces again; they sleep, and they are dust among those mighty mountains in

the West. Where is the grave of the Father Miguel, or of Don Esclevador, or of any of the valiant Spanish exiles, it is not to tell; God only knoweth, and the saints: all sleep in the faith, and their reward is certain. But where sleepeth the Jew all may see and know; for on that awful mountain-side, in a spot inaccessible to man, lieth the holy cross of snow. The winds pass lightly over that solemn tomb, and never a sunbeam lingereth there. White and majestic it lies where God's hands have placed it, and its mighty arms stretch forth as in a benediction upon the fleeting dust beneath.

So shall it bide forever upon that mountain-side, and the memory of the Jew and of all else human shall fade away and be forgotten in the surpassing glory of the love and the compassion of him that bore the redeeming burden to Calvary.

II.

THE ROSE AND THE THRUSH.



HERE was none other in the quiet valley so happy as the rose-tree, — none other so happy unless perchance it was the thrush who made his home in the linden yonder. The thrush loved the rose-tree's daughter, and he was happy in thinking that some day she would be his bride. Now the rose-tree had many daughters, and each was beautiful ; but the rose whom the thrush loved was more beautiful than her sisters, and all the wooers came wooing her until at last the fair creature's head was turned, and the rose grew capricious and disdainful. Among her many

lovers were the south wind and the fairy Dewlove and the little elf-prince Beam-bright and the hoptoad, whom all the rest called Mr. Roughbrown. The hoptoad lived in the stone-wall several yards away; but every morning and evening he made a journey to the rose-tree, and there he would sit for hours gazing with tender longings at the beautiful rose, and murmuring impassioned avowals. The rose's disdain did not chill the hoptoad's ardor. "See what I have brought you, fair rose," he would say. "A beautiful brown beetle with golden wings and green eyes! Surely there is not in all the world a more delicious morsel than a brown beetle! Or, if you but say the word, I will fetch you a tender little fly, or a young gnat, — see, I am willing to undergo all toils and dangers for your own sweet sake."

Poor Mr. Roughbrown! His wooing was very hopeless. And all the time he courted the imperious rose, who should be peeping at him from her home in the hedge but as plump and as sleek a little Miss Dormouse

as ever you saw, and her eyes were full of envy.

“ If Mr. Roughbrown had any sense,” she said to herself, “ he would waste no time on that vain and frivolous rose. He is far too good a catch for *her*.”

The south wind was forever sighing and sobbing about. He lives, you know, very many miles from here. His home is beyond a great sea; in the midst of a vast desert there is an oasis, and it is among the palm-trees and the flowers of this oasis that the south wind abides. When spring calls from the North, “ O south wind, where are you? Come hither, my sunny friend!” the south wind leaps from his couch in the far-off oasis, and hastens whither the spring-time calls. As he speeds across the sea the mermaids seek to tangle him in their tresses, and the waves try to twine their white arms about him; but he shakes them off and laughingly flies upon his way. Wheresoever he goes he is beloved. With their soft, solemn music the pine-trees seek to detain him; the flowers of

earth lift up their voices and cry, "Abide with us, dear spirit,"— but to all he answers : " The spring-time calls me in the North, and I must hasten whither she calls." But when the south wind came to the rose-tree he would go no farther ; he loved the rose, and he lingered about her with singing and sighing and protestations.

It was not until late in the evening that Dewlove and the elf-prince appeared. Just as the moon rolled up in the horizon and poured a broad streak of silver through the lake the three crickets went "Chirp-chirp, chirp-chirp, chirp-chirp," and then out danced Dewlove and Beambright from their hiding-places. The cunning little fairy lived under the moss at the foot of the oak-tree ; he was no bigger than a cambric needle,— but he had *two* eyes, and in this respect he had quite the advantage of the needle. As for the elf-prince, his home was in the tiny, dark subterranean passage which the mole used to live in ; he was plump as a cupid, and his hair was long and curly, although if you

force me to it I must tell you that the elf-prince was really no larger than your little finger,—so you will see that so far as physical proportions were concerned Dewlove and Beambright were pretty well matched. Merry, merry fellows they were, and I should certainly fail most lamentably did I attempt to tell you how prettily they danced upon the greensward of the meadow-lands throughout the summer nights. Sometimes the other fairies and elves joined them,—delicate little lady fairies with gossamer wings, and chubby little lady elves clad in filmy spider webs,—and they danced and danced and danced, while the three crickets went “Chirp-chirp, chirp-chirp, chirp-chirp,” all night long. Now it was very strange—was it not?—that instead of loving one of these delicate little lady fairies, or one of these chubby little lady elves, both Dewlove and Beambright loved the rose. Yet, she was indeed very beautiful.

The thrush did not pester the rose with his protestations of love. He was not a partic-

ularly proud fellow, but he thought too much of the rose to vex her with his pleadings. But all day long he would perch in the thicket and sing his songs as only a thrush can sing to the beautiful rose he loves. He sung, we will say, of the forests he had explored, of the famous river he had once seen, of the dew which the rose loved, of the storm-king that slew the old pine and made his cones into a crown,—he sung of a thousand things which we might not understand, but which pleased the rose because *she* understood them. And one day the thrush swooped down from the linden upon a monstrous devil's darning-needle that came spinning along and poised himself to stab the beautiful rose. Yes, like lightning the thrush swooped down on this murderous monster, and he bit him in two, and I am glad of it, and so are you if your heart be not wholly callous.

“How comes it,” said the rose-tree to the thrush that day,—“how comes it that you do not woo my daughter? You have

shown that you love her; why not speak to her?"

"No, I will wait," answered the thrush. "She has many wooers, and each wooes her in his own way. Let me show her by my devotion that I am worthy of her, and then perchance she will listen kindly to me when I speak to her."

The rose-tree thought very strange of this; in all her experience of bringing out her fair daughters into society she had never before had to deal with so curious a lover as the thrush. She made up her mind to speak for him.

"My daughter," said she to the rose, "the thrush loves you; of all your wooers he is the most constant and the most amiable. I pray that you will hear kindly to his suit."

The rose laughed carelessly,—yes, merrily,—as if she heeded not the heartache which her indifference might cause the honest thrush.

"Mother," said the rose, "these suitors are pestering me beyond all endurance. How can I have any patience with the south wind,

who is forever importuning me with his sentimental sighs and melancholy wheezing? And as for that old hoptoad, Mr. Rough-brown,—why, it is a husband I want, not a father!"

"Prince Beambright pleases you, then?" asked the rose-tree.

"He is a merry, capering fellow," said the daughter, "and so is his friend Dewlove; but I do not fancy either. And as for the thrush who sends you to speak for him,—why, he is quite out of the question, I assure you. The truth is, mother, that I am to fill a higher station than that of bride to any of these simple rustic folk. Am I not more beautiful than any of my companions, and have I not ambitions above all others of my kind?"

"Whom have you seen that you talk so vain-gloriously?" cried the rose-tree, in alarm. "What flattery has instilled into you this fatal poison?"

"Have you not seen the poet who comes this way every morning?" asked the rose.

“His face is noble, and he sings grandly to the pictures Nature spreads before his eyes. I should be his bride. Some day he will see me; he will bear me away upon his bosom; he will indite to me a poem that shall live forever!”

These words the thrush heard, and his heart sank within him. If his songs that day were not so blithe as usual it was because of the words that the rose had spoken. Yet the thrush sang on, and his song was full of his honest love.

It was the next morning that the poet came that way. He lived in the city, but each day he stole away from the noise and crowd of the city to commune with himself and with Nature in the quiet valley where bloomed the rose-tree, where the thrush sung, and where dwelt the fays and the elves of whom it has been spoken. The sun shone fiercely; withal the quiet valley was cool, and the poet bared his brow to the breeze that swept down the quiet valley from the lake over yonder.

“The south wind loves the rose! Aha, aha, foolish brother to love the rose!”

This was what the breeze said, and the poet heard it. Then *his* eyes fell upon the rose-tree and upon her blooming daughters.

“The hoptoad loves the rose! Foolish old Roughbrown to love the rose, aha, ha!”

There was a malicious squeakiness in this utterance,—of course it came from that envious Miss Dormouse, who was forever peeping out of her habitation in the hedge.

“What a beautiful rose!” cried the poet, and leaping over the old stone-wall he plucked the rose from the mother-tree,—yes, the poet bore away this very rose who had hoped to be the poet’s bride.

Then the rose-tree wept bitterly, and so did her other daughters; the south wind wailed, and the old hoptoad gave three croaks so dolorous that if you had heard them you would have said that his heart was truly broken. All were sad,—all but the envious dormouse, who chuckled maliciously, and said it was no more than they deserved.

The thrush saw the poet bearing the rose away, yet how could the fluttering little creature hope to prevail against the cruel invader? What could he do but twitter in anguish? So there are tragedies and heart-aches in lives that are not human.

As the poet returned to the city he wore the rose upon his breast. The rose was happy, for the poet spoke to her now and then, and praised her loveliness, and she saw that her beauty had given him an inspiration.

“The rose despised my brother! Aha, aha, foolish rose, — but she shall wither !”

It was the breeze that spake; far away from the lake in the quiet valley its voice was very low, but the rose heard and trembled.

“It’s a lie,” cried the rose. “I shall not die. The poet loves me, and I shall live forever upon his bosom.”

Yet a singular faintness—a faintness never felt before—came upon the rose; she bent her head and sighed. The heat—that was all—was very oppressive, and here

at the entrance to the city the tumult aroused an aggravating dust. The poet seemed suddenly to forget the rose. A carriage was approaching, and from the carriage leaned a lady, who beckoned to the poet. The lady was very fair, and the poet hastened to answer her call. And as he hastened the rose fell from his bosom into the hot highway, and the poet paid no heed. Ascending into the carriage with the lady (I am sure she must have been a princess!) the poet was whirled away, and there in the stifling dust lay the fainting rose, all stained and dying.

The sparrows flew down and pecked at her inquisitively; the cruel wagons crushed her beneath their iron wheels; careless feet buffeted her hither and thither. She was no longer a beautiful rose; no, nor even a reminiscence of one,—simply a colorless, scentless, ill-shapen mass.

But all at once she heard a familiar voice, and then she saw familiar eyes. The voice was tender and the eyes were kindly.

“O honest thrush,” cried the rose, “is it

you who have come to reproach me for my folly?"

"No, no, dear rose," said the thrush, "how should I speak ill to you? Come, rest your poor head upon my breast, and let me bear you home."

"Let me rather die here," sighed the rose, "for it was here that my folly brought me. How could I go back with you whom I never so much as smiled upon? And do they not hate and deride me in the valley,—I would rather die here in misery than there in shame!"

"Poor, broken flower, they love you," urged the thrush. "They grieve for you; let me bear you back where the mother-tree will shade you, and where the south wind will nurse you—for—for he loves you."

So the thrush bore back the withering rose to her home in the quiet valley.

"So she has come back, has she," sneered the dormouse. "Well, she has impudence, if nothing else!"

"She was pretty once," said the old hoptoad; "but she lost her opportunity when I

made up my mind to go wooing a certain glossy damsel in the hedge."

The rose-tree reached out her motherly arms to welcome her dying daughter, and she said: "Rest here, dear one, and let me rock you to repose."

It was evening in the quiet valley now. Where was the south wind that he came not with his wooing? He had flown to the North, for that day he had heard the spring-time's voice a-calling, and he went in answer to its summons. Everything was still. "Chirp-chirp, chirp-chirp, chirp-chirp," piped the three crickets, and forthwith the fairy boy and the elf-prince danced from their habitations. Their little feet tinkled over the clover and the daisies.

"Hush, little folk," cried the rose-tree. "Do not dance to-night,—the rose is dying."

But they danced on. The rose did not hear them; she heard only the voice of the thrush, who perched in the linden yonder, and, with a breaking heart, sung to the dying flower.

III.

THE PAGAN SEAL-WIFE.¹



T is to tell of Harold, the son of Egbert, the son of Ib; comely was he to look upon, and a braver than he lived not in these islands, nor one more beloved of all people. But it chanced upon a time, while he was still in early manhood, that a grievous sorrow befell him; for on a day his mother Eleanor came to her end in this full evil wise: It was her intent to go unto the neighboring island, where grazed the goats and the kine, and it fortuned that, as she made her way thither in the boat, she heard sweet music, as if one played upon a

¹ Orkney Folk-Lore.

harp in the waters, and, looking over the side of the boat, she beheld down in the waters a sea-maiden making those exceeding pleasant sounds. And the sea-maiden ceased to play, and smiled up at Eleanor, and stretched up her hands and besought Eleanor to pluck her from the sea into the boat, which seeking to do, Eleanor fell headlong into the waters, and was never thereafter seen either alive or dead by any of her kin. Now under this passing heavy grief Egbert, the son of Ib, being old and spent by toil, brake down, and on a night died, making with his latest breath most heavy lamentation for Eleanor, his wife; so died he, and his soul sped, as they tell, to that far northern land where the souls of the departed make merry all the night, which merriment sendeth forth so vast and so beautiful a light that all the heavens are illumined thereby. But Harold, the son of Egbert and of Eleanor, was left alone, having neither brother, nor sister, nor any of kin, save an uncle abiding many leagues distant in Jutland. Thereupon befell a wonderful

thing ; if it had not happened it would not be told.

It chanced that, on a certain evening in the summer-time, Harold walked alone where a Druid circle lay coiled like a dark serpent on a hillside ; his heart was filled with dolor, for he thought continually of Eleanor, his mother, and he wept softly to himself through love of that dear mother. While thus he walked in vast heaviness of soul, he was beheld of Membril, the fairy that with her goodly subjects dwelt in the ruin of the Pict's house hard by the Druid circle. And Membril had compassion upon Harold, and upon the exceeding fine down of a tiny seabird she rode out to meet him, and it was before his eyes as if a star shined out of a mist in his pathway. So it was that Membril the fairy made herself known to him, and having so done, she said and she sung :

“ I am Membril, queen of Fay,
That would charm thy grief away !
Thou art like the little bark
Drifting in the cold and dark, —

Drifting through the tempest's roar
To a rocky, icy shore;
All the torment dost thou feel
Of the spent and fearful seal
Wounded by the hunter's steel.
I am Membril,— hark to me :
Better times await on thee !
Wouldst thou clasp thy mother dear,—
Strange things see and stranger hear ?
Straight betake thee to thy boat
And to yonder haven float,—
Go thy way, and silent be,—
It is Membril counsels thee ;
Go thy way, and thou shalt see !”

Great marvel had Harold to this thing; nevertheless he did the bidding of Membril the fairy, and it was full wisely done. And presently he came to where his boat lay, half on the shore and half in the waters, and he unloosed the thong that held it, and entered into the boat; but he put neither hand to the oars thereof, for he was intent to do the bidding of Membril the fairy. Then as if of its own accord, or as if the kindly waves themselves bore it along, the boat moved

upon the waters and turned toward the yonder haven whereof it was said and sung. Fair shone the moon, and the night was passing fair; the shadows fell from the hill-tops in their sleep and lay, as they had been little weary children, in the valleys and upon the shore, and they were rocked in the cradles of those valleys, and the waters along the shore sung softly to them. Upon the one side lay the island where grazed the goats and the kine, and upon the other side lay the island where Harold and other people abode; between these islands crept the sea with its gentle murmurings, and upon this sea drifted the boat bearing Harold to the yonder haven. Now the haven whereunto the course lay brooded almost beneath the shadow of the Stennis stones, and the waters thereof were dark, as if, forsooth, the sea frowned whensoever it saw those bloody stones peering down into its tranquil bosom. And some said that the place was haunted, and that upon each seventh night came thereunto the spirits of them that had been

slain upon those stones, and waved their ghostly arms and wailed grievously; but of latter times none believeth this thing to be true.

It befell that, coming into the haven and bearing toward the shore thereof, Harold was ware of sweet music, and presently he saw figures as of men and women dancing upon the holm; but neither could he see who these people were, nor could he tell wherefrom the music came. But such fair music never had he heard before, and with great marvel he came from the boat into the cluster of beech-trees that stood between the haven and that holm where the people danced. Then of a sudden Harold saw twelve skins lying upon the shore in the moonlight; and they were the comeliest and most precious sealskins that ever he saw, and he coveted them. So presently he took up one of the sealskins and bore it with him into his boat, and pushed the boat from the shore into the waters of the haven again, and, so doing, there was such plashing of

the waters that those people dancing upon the fair green holm became ware of Harold's presence, and were afeared, so that, ceasing from their sport, they made haste down to the shore and did on the skins and dived into the waters with shrill cries. But there was one of them that could not do so, because Harold bore off that skin where-with she was wont to begird herself, and when she found it not she wailed and wept and besought Harold to give her that skin again,—and, lo! it was Eleanor, the wife of Egbert! Now when Harold saw that it was his mother that so entreated him he was filled with wonder, and he drew nearer the shore to regard her and to hear her words, for he loved her passing well. But he denied her that skin, knowing full well that so soon as she possessed it she would leave him and he should never again behold her. Then Eleanor related to him how that she had been drowned in the sea through treachery of the harp-maiden, and how that the souls of drowned people entered into the

bodies of seals, nor were permitted to return to earth, save only one night in every month, at which time each recovered his human shape and was suffered to dance in the moonlight upon the fair green holm from the hour of sunset unto the hour of sunrise.

“Give me the skin, I pray thee,” she cried, “for if the sun came upon me unawares I should crumble into dust before thine eyes, and that moment would a curse fall upon you. I am happy as I am; the sea and those who dwell therein are good to me,—give me the skin, I beseech thee, that I may return whence I came, and thereby shall a great blessing accrue to thee and thine.”

But Harold said: “Nay, mother, I were a fool to part so cheerfully with one whom I love dearer than life itself! I shall not let you go so easily; you shall come with me to our home, where I have lived alone too long already. I shall be alone no longer,—come with me, I say, for I will not deliver up this skin, nor shall any force wrest it from me!”

Then Eleanor, his mother, reasoned a space with him, and anon she showed him the folly of his way; but still he hung his head upon his breast and was loth to do her bidding, until at last she sware unto him that if he gave to her that skin he should, upon the next dancing night, have to wife the most beautiful maiden in the world, and therefore should be alone in the world no more. To this presently Harold gave assent, and then Eleanor, his mother, bade him come to that same spot one month hence, and do what she should then bid him do. Receiving, therefore, the skin from him, she folded it about her and threw herself into the sea, and Harold betook himself unto his home.

Now wit ye well that full wearily dragged the days and the nights until that month was spent; but now at last it was the month of August, and upon the night of the seventh day thereof ended the season of waiting. It is to tell that upon that night came Harold, the son of Egbert, from his hut, and stood

on the threshold thereof, and awaited the rising of the moon from out the silver waters yonder. While thus he stood there appeared unto him Membril the fairy, and smiling upon him she said and she sung :—

“ I am Membril, queen of Fay,
Come to urge thee on thy way;
Haste to yonder haven-side
Where awaits thy promised bride;
Daughter of a king is she,—
Many leagues she comes to thee,
Thine and only thine to be.
Haste and see, then come again
To thy pretty home, and, when
Smiles the sun on earth once more,
Will come knocking at thy door;
Open then, and to thy breast
Clasp whom thou shalt love the best !
It is Membril counsels thee,—
Haste and see what thou shalt see ! ”

Now by this thing was Harold mightily rejoiced, and he believed it to be truth that great good was in store for him ; for he had seen pleasant things in the candle a many nights, and the smoke from his fire blew

cheerily and lightly to the westward, and a swan had circled over his house that day week, and in his net each day for twice seven days had he drawn from the sea a fish having one golden eye and one silver eye: which things, as all men know, portend full goodly things, or else they portend nothing at all whatsoever. So, being pleasantly minded, Harold returned in kind unto Membril, the fairy queen, that bespoke him so courteously, and to her and to them that bore her company he said and he sung:—

“ Welcome, bonnie queen of Fay !
For thou speakest pleasing words ;
Thou shalt have a gill of whey
And a thimbleful of curds ;
In this rose is honey-dew
That a bee hath brought for you !

“ Welcome, bonnie queen of Fay !
Call thy sisters from the gloam,
And, whilst I am on my way,
Feast and frolic in my home, —
Kiss the moonbeams, blanching white,
Shrinking, shivering with affright !

“ Welcome, all, and have no fear, —
There is flax upon the sill,
No foul sprite can enter here, —
Feast and frolic as you will ;
Feast and frisk till break of day, —
Welcome, little folk of Fay ! ”

Thus having said and thus having sung, Harold went upon his way, and came to his boat and entered into it and journeyed to the haven where some time he had seen and discoursed with Eleanor, his mother. His course to this same haven lay, as before, over the waters that stole in between the two islands from the great sea beyond. Fair shone the moon, and the night was passing fair; the shadows rolled from the hilltops in their sleep and lay like little weary children in the valleys and upon the shore, and they were rocked in the cradles of those valleys, and the waters along the shore sung softly to them. Upon this hand lay the island where the goats and the kine found sweet pasturage, and upon the other hand stretched the island where people abode, and where

the bloody Stennis stones rebuked the smiling sky, and where ghosts walked and wailed and waved their white arms in the shadows of those haunted ruins where once upon a time the Picts had dwelt. And Harold's heart was full of joy, the more in especial when, as he bore nigh unto the haven, he heard sweet music and beheld a goodly company of people that danced in the moonlight upon the fair green holm. Then, when presently his boat touched the inner shore of the haven, and he departed therefrom and drew the boat upon the shore, he saw wherefrom issued the beautiful music to which the people danced; he saw that the waters reached out their white fingers and touched the kale and the fair pebbles and the brittle shells and the moss upon the beach, and these things gave forth sweet sounds, which were as if a thousand attuned harps vied with the singing of the summer-night winds. Then, as before, Harold saw sealskins lying upon the shore, and presently came Eleanor, his mother, and pointing to a

certain fair velvet skin, she said: "Take that fair velvet skin into thy boat and speed with all haste to thy home. To-morrow at sunrise thy bride shall come knocking at thy door. And so, farewell, my son,—oh, Harold, my only son!" Which saying, Eleanor, the wife of Egbert, drew a skin about her and leapt into the sea; nor was she ever thereafter beholden of human eyes.

Then Harold took up the fair velvet skin to which his mother had directed him, and he bore it away with him in his boat. So softly went he upon the waters that none of them that danced upon the fair green holm either saw or heard him. Still danced they on to the sweet music made by the white fingers of the waves, and still shone the white moon upon the fair green holm where they so danced.

Now when came Harold to his home, bearing the precious skin with him, he saw the fairies at play upon the floor of his hut, and they feared no evil, for there was barley

strewn upon the sill so that no wicked sprite could enter there. And when Membril, the fairy queen, saw him bringing the skin that he had found upon the shore, she bade him good welcome, and she said and she sung :—

“ I am Membril, queen of Fay,—
Ponder well what words I say ;
Hide that fair and velvet skin
Some secluded spot within ;
In the tree where ravens croak,—
In the hollow of the oak,
In the cave with mosses lined,
In the earth where none may find ;
Hide it quick and hide it deep,—
So secure shall be thy sleep,
Thine shall bride and blessings be,
Thine a fair posterity,—
So doth Membril counsel thee ! ”

So, pondering upon this counsel and thinking well of it, Harold took the fair velvet skin and hid it, and none knew where it was hid,—none save only the raven that lived in the hollow oak. And when he had so done he returned unto his home and lay upon his bed and slept. It came to pass that early

upon the morrow, when the sun made all the eastward sky blush for the exceeding ardor of his morning kiss, there came a knocking at the door of Harold's hut, and Harold opened the door, and lo ! there stood upon the threshold the fairest maiden that eyes ever beheld. Unlike was she to maidens dwelling in those islands, for her hair was black as the waters of the long winter night, and her eyes were as the twin midnight rocks that look up from the white waves of the moonlit sea in yonder reef ; withal was she most beautiful to look upon, and her voice was as music that stealeth to one over pleasant waters.

The maiden's name was Persis, and she was the daughter of a Pagan king that ruled in a country many, many — oh, many leagues to the southward of these islands, in a country where unicorns and dragons be, and where dwelleth the phœnix and hippocgriffs and the cockatrix, and where bloometh a tree that runneth blood, and where mighty princes do wondrous things. Now it for-

tuned that the king was minded to wed his daughter Persis unto a neighboring prince, a high and mighty prince, but one whom Persis loved not, neither could she love. So for the first time Persis said, "Nay, I will not," unto her father's mandate, whereat the king was passing wroth, and he put his daughter in a place that was like a jail to her, for it was where none might see her, and where she might see none,—none but those that attended upon her. This much told Persis, the Pagan princess, unto Harold, and then, furthermore, she said: "The place wherein I was put by the king, my father, was hard by the sea, and oftentimes I went thereon in my little boat, and once, looking down from that boat into the sea, I saw the face of a fair young man within a magic mirror that was held up in the waters of the sea by two ghostly hands, and the fair young man moved his lips and smiled at me, and methought I heard him say; 'Come, be my bride, O fair and gentle Persis!' But, vastly afeared, I cried out and put back

again to shore. Yet in my dreams I saw that face and heard that voice, nor could I find any rest until I came upon the sea again in hope to see the face and hear the voice once more. Then, that second time, as I looked into the sea, another face came up from below and lifted above the waters, and a woman's voice spake thus to me: 'I am mother of him that loveth thee and whom thou lovest; his face hast thou seen in the mirror, and of thee I have spoken to him; come, let me bear thee as a bride to him!' And in that moment a faintness came upon me and I fell into her arms, and so was I drowned (as men say), and so was I a seal a little space until last dancing night, when, lo! some one brought me to life again, and one that said her name was Membril showed me the way unto thy door. And now I look upon thy face in truth, and thou art he who shall have me to his wife, for thou art he whose face I saw within the mirror which the ghostly hands bore up to me that day upon the sea!"

Great then was Harold's joy, and he folded her in his arms, and he spake sweet words to her, and she was content. So they were wed that very day, and there came to do them honor all the folk upon these islands: Dougal and Tam and Ib and Robbie and Nels and Gram and Rupert and Rolf and many others and all their kin, and they made merry, and it was well. And never spake the Pagan princess of that soft velvet skin which Harold had hid away,— never spake she of it to him or to any other one.

It is to tell that to Harold and to Persis were born these children, and in this order: Egbert and Ib (that was nicknamed the Strong) and Harold and Joan and Tam and Annie and Rupert the Fair and Flocken and Elsa and Albert and Theodoric,— these eleven children were born unto them in good time; and right fair children were they to see, comely and stout, yet sweetly minded withal. And prosperous times continually befell Harold; his herds multiplied, and the fish came into his

nets, so that presently there was none other richer than he in all that country, and he did great good with his riches, for he had compassion to the poor. So Harold was beloved of all, and all spake full fairly of his wife,—how that she cared for his little ones, and kept the house, and did deeds of sweet charity among the needy and distressed,—ay, so was Persis, the wife of Harold, beloved of all, and by none other more than by Harold, who was wont to say that Persis had brought him all he loved best: his children, his fortune, his happiness, and, best of all, herself. So now they were wed twice seven years, and in that time was Persis still as young and fair to look upon as when she came to Harold's door for the first time and knocked. This I account to be a marvel, but still more a marvel was it that in all these years spake she never a word of that soft velvet skin which Harold took and hid,—never a word to him nor to any one else. But the soft velvet skin lay meanwhile in the hollow of the oak, and in the branches of that tree

perched a raven that croaked and croaked and croaked.

Now it befell upon a time that a ship touched at that island, and there came therefrom men that knelt down upon the shore and made strange prayers to a strange god, and forthwith uplifted in that island a symbol of wood in the similitude of a cross. Straightway went Harold with the rest to know the cause thereof, being fearful lest for this impiety their own gods, whom they served diligently, should send hail and fire upon them and their herds. But those that had come in the ship spake gently with them and showed themselves to be peaceful folk whose god delighted not in wars, but rather in gentleness and love. How it was, I, knowing not, cannot say, but presently the cause of that new god, whose law was gentleness and love, waxed mightily, and the people came from all around to kiss that cross and worship it. And among them came Harold, for in his heart had dawned the light of a new wisdom, and he knew the

truth as we know it, you and I. So Harold was baptized in the Christian faith, he and his children; but Persis, his wife, was not baptized, for she was the daughter of a Pagan king, and she feared to bring evil upon those she loved by doing any blasphemous thing. Right sorely grieved was Harold because of this, and oftentimes he spake with her thereof, and oftentimes he prayed unto his god and ours to incline her mind toward the cross which saveth all alike. But Persis would say: "My best beloved, let me not do this thing in haste, for I fear to vex thy god since I am a Pagan and the daughter of a Pagan king, and therefore have not within me the light that there is in thee and thy kind. Perchance (since thy god is good and gracious) the light will come to me anon, and shine before mine eyes as it shineth before thine. I pray thee, let me bide my time." So spake Persis, and her life ever thereafter was kind and charitable, as, soothly, it had ever before been, and she served Harold, her husband, well,

and she was beloved of all, and a great sweetness came to all out of her daily life.

It fortuned, upon a day whilst Harold was from home, there was knocking at the door of their house, and forthwith the door opened and there stood in the midst of them one clad all in black and of rueful countenance. Then, as if she foresaw evil, Persis called unto her little ones and stood between them and that one all in black, and she demanded of him his name and will. "I am the Death-Angel," quoth he, "and I come for the best beloved of thy lambs!"

Now Theodoric was that best beloved; for he was her very little one, and had always slept upon her bosom. So when she heard those words she made a great outcry, and wrestled with the Death-Angel, and sought to stay him in his purpose. But the Death-Angel chilled her with his breath, and overcame her, and prevailed against her; and he reached into the midst of them and took Theodoric in his arms and folded him upon his breast, and Theodoric fell asleep there,

and his head drooped upon the Death-Angel's shoulder. But in her battle for the child, Persis catched at the chain about the child's neck, and the chain brake and remained in her hand, and upon the chain was the little cross of fair alabaster which an holy man had put there when Theodoric was baptized. So the Death-Angel went his way with that best beloved lamb, and Persis fell upon her face and wailed.

The years went on and all was well upon these islands. Egbert became a mighty fisherman, and Ib (that was nicknamed the Strong) wrought wondrous things in Norway, as all men know; Joan was wed to Cuthbert the Dane, and Flocken was wooed of a rich man's son of Scotland. So were all things for good and for the best, and it was a marvel to all that Persis, the wife of Harold, looked still to be as young and beautiful as when she came from the sea to be her husband's bride. Her life was full of gentleness and charity, and all folk blessed her. But never in all these years spake she

aught to any one of the fair velvet skin ; and through all the years that skin lay hid in the hollow of the oak-tree, where the raven croaked and croaked and croaked.

At last upon a time a malady fell upon Persis, and a strange light came into her eyes, and naught they did was of avail to her. One day she called Harold to her, and said : " My beloved, the time draweth near when we twain must part. I pray thee, send for the holy man, for I would fain be baptized in thy faith and in the faith of our children." So Harold fetched the holy man, and Persis, the daughter of the Pagan king, was baptized, and she spake freely and full sweetly of her love to Jesus Christ, her Saviour, and she prayed to be taken into his rest. And when she was baptized, there was given to her the name of Ruth, which was most fairly done, I trow, for soothly she had been the friend of all.

Then, when the holy man was gone, she said to her husband : " Beloved, I beseech thee go to yonder oak-tree, and bring me

from the hollow thereof the fair velvet skin that hath lain therein so many years."

Then Harold marvelled, and he cried : "Who told thee that the fair velvet skin was hidden there ? "

"The raven told me all," she answered ; "and had I been so minded I might have left thee long ago, — thee and our little ones. But I loved thee and them, and the fair velvet skin hath been unseen of me."

"And wouldest thou leave us now ? " he cried. "Nay, it shall not be ! Thou shalt not see that fair velvet skin, for this very day will I cast it into the sea ! "

But she put an arm about his neck and said : "This night, dear one, we part ; but whether we shall presently be joined together in another life I know not, neither canst thou say ; for I, having been a Pagan and the daughter of a Pagan king, may by my birth and custom have so grievously offended our true God that even in his compassion and mercy he shall not find pardon for me. Therefore I would have thee fetch — since I

shall die this night and do require of thee this last act of kindness—I would have thee fetch that same fair velvet skin from yonder oak-tree, and wrap me therein, and bear me hence, and lay me upon the green holm by the farther haven, for this is dancing night, and the seal-folk shall come from the sea as is their wont. Thou shalt lay me, so wrapped within that fair velvet skin, upon that holm, and thou shalt go a space aside and watch throughout the night, coming not anear me (as thou lovest me!) until the dawn breaks, nor shalt thou make any outcry, but thou shalt wait until the night is sped. Then, when thou comest at daybreak to the holm, if thou findest me in the fair velvet skin thou shalt know that my sin hath been pardoned; but if I be not there thou mayst know that, being a Pagan, the seal-folk have borne me back into the sea unto my kind. Thus do I require of thee; swear so to do, and let thy beloved bless thee."

So Harold swore to do, and so he did. Straightway he went to the oak-tree and

took from the hollow thereof the fair velvet skin ; seeing which deed, the raven flew away and was never thereafter seen in these islands. And with a heavy heart, and with full many a caress and word of love, did Harold bind his fair wife in that same velvet skin, and he bore her to his boat, and they went together upon the waters ; for he had sworn so to do. His course unto the haven lay as before over the waters that stole in between the two islands from the great troubled sea beyond. Fair shone the moon, and the night was passing fair ; the shadows lay asleep, like little weary children, in the valleys, and the waters moaned, and the winds rebuked the white fingers that stretched up from the waves to clutch them. And when they were come to the inner shore of the haven, Harold took his wife and bore her up the bank and laid her where the light came down from the moon and slept full sweetly upon the fragrant sward. Then, kissing her, he went his way and sat behind the Stennis stones a goodly space beyond, and

there he kept his watch, as he had sworn to do.

Now wit ye well a grievous heavy watch it was that night, for his heart yearned for that beloved wife that lay that while upon the fair green holm,—ay, never before had night seemed so long to Harold as did that dancing night when he waited for the seal-folk to come where the some time Pagan princess lay wrapped in the fair velvet skin. But while he watched and waited, Membril, the fairy queen, came and brought others of her kind with her, and they made a circle about Harold, and threw around him such a charm that no evil could befall him from the ghosts and ghouls that in their shrouds walked among those bloody stones and wailed wofully and waved their white arms. For Membril, coming to Harold in the similitude of a glow-worm, made herself known to him, and she said and she sung:

“Loving heart, be calm a space
In this gloomy vigil place;

Though these confines haunted be
Naught of harm can come to thee —
Nothing canst thou see or hear
Of the ghosts that stalk anear,
For around thee Membril flings
Charms of Fay and fairy rings."

Nothing daunted was Harold by thoughts of evil monsters, and naught recked he of the uncanny dangers of that haunted place; but he addressed these words to Membril and her host, and he said and he sung:

"Tell me if thy piercing eyes
See the inner haven shore
There my Own Beloved lies,
With the cowslips bending o'er :
Speed, O gentle folk of Fay !
And in guise of cowslips say
I shall love my love for aye !"

Even so did Membril and the rest; and presently they returned, and they brought these words unto Harold, saying and singing them : —

"We as cowslips in that place
Clustered round thy dear one's face,

And we whispered to her there
Those same words we went to bear ;
And she smiled and bade us then
Bear these words to thee again :
' Die we shall, and part we may, —
Love is love and lives for aye ! ' "

Then of a sudden there was a tumult upon the waters, as if the waters were troubled, and there came up out of the waters a host of seals that made their way to the shore and cast aside their skins and came forth in the forms of men and of women, for they were the drowned folk that were come, as was their wont, to dance in the moonlight upon the fair green holm. At that moment the waters stretched out their white fingers and struck the kale and the pebbles and the soft moss upon the beach, for they sought to make music for the seal-folk to dance thereby ; but the music that was made was not merry nor gleeful, but was passing grawsome and mournful. And presently the seal-folk came where lay the wife of Harold wrapped in the fair velvet skin, and they knew her of

old, and they called her by what name she was known to them, "Persis! Persis!" over and over again, and there was great wailing among the seal-folk for a mighty space; and the seal-folk danced never at all that night, but wailed about the wife of Harold, and called "Persis! Persis!" over and over again, and made great moan. And at last all was still once more, for the seal-folk, weeping and clamoring grievously, went back into the sea, and the sea sobbed itself to sleep.

Mindful of the oath he swore, Harold dared not go down to that shore, but he besought Membril, the queen of Fay, to fetch him tidings from his beloved, whether she still lay upon the holm, or whether the seal-folk had borne her away with them into the waters of the deep. But Membril might not go, nor any of her host, for already the dawn was in the east and the kine were lowing on yonder slope. So Harold was left alone a tedious time, until the sun looked upon the earth, and then, with clamoring heart, Harold came from the Stennis stones

and leapt downward to the holm where his beloved had lain that weary while. Then he saw that the fair velvet skin was still there, and presently he saw that within the skin his beloved still reposed. He called to her, but she made no answer; with exceeding haste he kneeled down and did off the fair velvet skin, and folded his beloved to his breast. The sun shone full upon her glorious face and kissed away the dew that clung to her white cheeks.

“Thou art redeemed, O my beloved!” cried Harold; but her lips spake not, and her eyes opened not upon him. Yet on the dead wife’s face was such a smile as angels wear, and it told him that they should meet again in a love that knoweth no fear of parting. And as Harold held her to his bosom and wailed, there fell down from her hand what she had kept with her to the last, and it lay upon the fair green holm,—the little alabaster cross which she had snatched from Theodoric’s neck that day the Death-Angel bore the child away.

It was to tell of Harold, the son of Egbert, the son of Ib, and of Persis, his wife, daughter of the Pagan king; and it hath been told. And there is no more to tell, for the tale is ended.

IV.

FLAIL, TRASK, AND BISLAND.



Y quondam friends, Flail, Trask, and Bisland, are no more ; they are dead, and with them has gone out of existence as gross an imposition as the moral cowardice of man were capable of inventing, constructing, and practicing.

When Alice became my wife she knew that I was a lover and collector of books, but, being a young thing, she had no idea of the monstrous proportions which bibliomania, unchecked, is almost certain to acquire. Indeed, the dear girl innocently and rapturously encouraged this insidious vice. "Some time," she used to say, "we shall have a house of

our own, and then your library shall cover the whole top-floor, and the book-cases shall be built in the walls, and there shall be a lovely blue-glass skylight," etc. Moreover, although she could not tell the difference between an Elzevir and a Pickering, or between a folio and an octavo, Alice was very proud of our little library, and I recall now with real delight the times I used to hear her showing off those precious books to her lady callers. Alice made up for certain inaccuracies of information with a distinct enthusiasm and garrulity that never failed to impress her callers deeply. I was mighty proud of Alice ; I was prepared to say, paraphrasing Sam Johnson's remark about the Scotchmen, "A wife can be made much of, if caught young."

It was not until after little Grolier and little Richard du Bury were born to us that Alice's regard for my pretty library seemed to abate. I then began to realize the truth of what my bachelor friend Kinzie had often declared,—namely, that the chief objection

to children was that they weaned the collector from his love of books. Grolier was a mischievous boy, and I had hard work trying to convince his mother that he should by no means be allowed to have his sweet but destructive will with my Bewicks and Bedfords. Thumb and finger marks look well enough in certain places, but I protested that they did not enhance the quaint beauty of an old wood-cut, a delicate binding, or a wide margin. And Richard du Bury—a lovely little 16mo of a child—was almost as destructive as his older brother. The most painful feature of it all to me then was that their mother actually protected the toddling knaves in their vandalism. I never saw another woman change so as Alice did after those two boys came to us. Why, she even suggested to me one day that when we *did* build our new house we should devote the upper story thereof *not* to library but to nursery purposes!

Things gradually got to the pass that I began to be afraid to bring books into the

house. At first Alice used to reproach me indirectly by eying the new book jealously, and hinting in a subtle, womanly way that Grolier needed new shoes, or that Richard was sadly in need of a new cap. Presently, encouraged by my lamblike reticence, Alice began to complain gently of what she termed my extravagance, and finally she fell into the pernicious practice of berating me roundly for neglecting my family for the selfish—yes, the cruel—gratification of a foolish fad, and then she would weep and gather up the two boys and wonder how soon we should all be in the poorhouse.

I have spoken of my bachelor friend, Kinzie; there was a philosopher for you, and his philosophy was all the sweeter because it had never been embittered by marital experience. I had confidence in Kinzie, and I told him all about the dilemma I was in. He pitied me and condoled with me, for he was a sympathetic man, and he was, too, as consistent a bibliomaniac as I ever met with. “Be of good cheer,” said he, “we

shall find a way out of all this trouble." And he suggested a way. I seized upon it as the proverbial drowning man is supposed to clutch at the proverbial straw.

The next time I took a bundle of books home I marched into the house boldly with them. Alice fetched a deep sigh. "Ah, been buying more books, have you?" she asked in a despairing tone.

"No, indeed," I answered triumphantly; "they were given to me,—a present from Judge Trask. I'm in great luck, ain't I?"

Alice was almost as pleased as I was. The interest with which she inspected the lovely volumes was not feigned. "But who is Judge Trask?" she asked, as she read the autographic lines upon a flyleaf in each book. I explained glibly that the judge was a wealthy and cultured citizen who felt somewhat under obligation to me for certain little services I had rendered him one time and another. I was not to be trapped or cornered. I had learned my sinful lesson per-

fectly. Alice never so much as suspected me of evil.

The scheme worked so well that I pursued it with more or less diligence. I should say that about twice a week on an average a bundle of books came to the house "with the compliments" of either Judge Trask or Colonel Flail or Mr. Bisland. You can understand that I could not hope to play the Trask deception exclusively and successfully. I invented Colonel Flail and Mr. Bisland, and I contrived to render them quite as liberal in their patronage as the mythical Judge Trask himself. Occasionally a donation came in, by way of variety, from Smeaton and Holbrook and Caswell and other solitary creations of my mendacious imagination, when I used to blind poor dear Alice to the hideous truth. Touching myself, I gave it out that I had abandoned book-buying, was convinced of the folly of the mania, had reformed and was repentant. Alice loved me all the better for that, and she became once more the sweetest, most amiable little woman

in all the world. She was inexpressibly happy in the fond delusion that I had become prudent and thrifty, and was putting money in bank for that home we were going to buy — sometime.

Meanwhile the names of Flail, Trask, and Bisland became household words with us. Occasionally Smeaton and Holbrook and Caswell were mentioned gratefully as some fair volume bearing their autograph was inspected; but, after all, Flail, Trask, and Bisland were the favorites, for it was from them that most of my beloved books came. Yes, Alice gradually grew to love those three myths; she loved them because they were good to *me*.

Alice had, like most others of her sex, a strong sense of duty. She determined to do something for my noble friends, and finally she planned a lovely little dinner whereat Judge Trask and Colonel Flail and Mr. Bisland were to be regaled with choicest viands of Alice's choice larder and with the sweetest speeches of Alice's graceful heart. I was

authorized only to convey the invitations to this delectable banquet, and here was a pretty plight for a man to be in, surely enough! But my bachelor friend Kinzie (ough, the Mephisto !) helped me out. I reported back to Alice that Judge Trask was out of town, that Colonel Flail was sick abed with grip, and that Mr. Bisland was altogether too shy a man to think of venturing out to a dinner alone. Alice was dreadfully disappointed. Still there was consolation in feeling that she had done her duty in trying to do it.

Well, this system of deception and perjury went on a long time, Alice never suspecting any evil, but perfectly happy in my supposed reform and economy, and in the gracious liberality of those three Mæcenas-like friends, Flail, Trask, and Bisland, who kept pouring in rare and beauteous old tomes upon me. She was joyous, too, in the prospect of that new house which we would soon be able to build, now that I had so long quit the old ruinous mania for book-buying! And I —

wretch that I was—I humored her in this conceit; I heaped perjury upon perjury: lying and deception had become my second nature. Yet I loathed myself and I hated those books; they reproached me every time I came into their presence. So I was miserable and helpless; how hard it is to turn about when one once gets into the downward path. The shifts I was put to, and the desperate devices which I was forced to employ,—I shudder to recall them! Life became a constant, terrifying lie.

Thank Heaven, it is over now, and my face is turned the right way. A third little son was born to us. Alice was, oh! so very ill. When she was convalescing she said to me one day: “Hiram, I have been thinking it all over, and I’ve made up my mind that we must name the baby Trask Flail Bisland, after our three good friends.”

I did n’t make any answer, went out into the hall and communed awhile with my own hideous, tormented self. How my soul revolted against the prospect of giving to that

innocent babe a name that would serve simply to scourge me through the rest of my wicked life! No, I could not consent to that. I would be a coward no longer!

I went back into Alice's room, and sat upon the bed beside her, and took one of Alice's dear little white hands in mine, and told her everything, told Alice the whole truth,—all about my wickedness and perjuries and deceptions; told her what a selfish, cruel monster I had been; dispelled all the sinful delusion about Flail, Trask and Bisland; threw myself, penitent and hopeless, upon my deceived, outraged little wife's mercy. Was it a mean advantage to take of a sick woman?

I fancied she would reproach me, for I knew that her heart was set upon that new house she had talked of so often; I told her that the savings she had supposed were in bank, were in reality represented only by and in those stately folios and sumptuous quartos which the mythical Flail, Trask, and Bisland had presumably donated. "But," I added, "I

shall sell them now, and with the money I shall build the home in which we may be happy again,— a lovely home, sweetheart, with no library at all, but all nursery if you wish it so ! ”

“ No,” said Alice, when I had ended my blubbering confession, “ we shall not part with the books ; they have caused you more suffering than they have me, and, moreover, their presence will have a beneficial effect upon you. Furthermore, I myself have become attached to them,— you know I thought they were given to you, and so I have learned to care for them. Poor Judge Trask and Colonel Flail and Mr. Bisland,— so they are only myths ? Dear Hiram,” she added with a sigh, “ I can forgive you for everything except for taking those three good men out of our lives ! ”

After all this I have indeed reformed. I have actually become prudent, and I have a bank-account that is constantly increasing. I do not hate books ; I simply do not buy them. And I eschew that old sinner, Kinzie,

and all the sinister influences he represents. As for our third little boy, we have named him Reform Meigs, after Alice's mother's grandfather, who built the first saw-mill in what is now the State of Ohio, and was killed by the Indians in 1796.

V.

THE TOUCH IN THE HEART.



LD Abel Dunklee was delighted, and so was old Abel's wife, when little Abel came. For this coming they had waited many years. God had prospered them elsewhere; this

one supreme blessing only had been withheld. Yet Abel had never despaired. "I shall some time have a son," said he. "I shall call him Abel. He shall be rich; he shall succeed to my business; my house, my factory, my lands, my fortune,—all shall be his!" Abel Dunklee felt this to be a certainty, and with this prospect constantly in mind he slaved and pinched and bargained.

So when at last the little one did come it was as heir to a considerable property.

The joy in the house of Dunklee was not shared by the community at large. Abel Dunklee was by no means a popular man. Folk had the well-defined opinion that he was selfish, miserly, and hard. If he had not been actually bad, he had never been what the world calls a good man. His methods had been of the grinding, sordid order. He had always been scrupulously honest in the payment of his debts, and in keeping his word; but his sense of duty seemed to stop there: Abel's idea of goodness was to owe no man any money. He never gave a penny to charities, and he never spent any time sympathizing with the misfortunes or distresses of other people. He was narrow, close, selfish, and hard, so his neighbors and the community at large said, and I shall not deny that the verdict was a just one.

When a little one comes into this world of ours, it is the impulse of the people here to

bid it welcome, and to make its lot pleasant. When little Abel was born no such enthusiasm obtained outside the austere Dunklee household. Popular sentiment found vent in an expression of the hope that the son and heir would grow up to scatter the dollars which old man Dunklee had accumulated by years of relentless avarice and unflagging toil. But Dr. Hardy — he who had officiated in an all-important capacity upon that momentous occasion in the Dunklee household — Dr. Hardy shook his head wisely, and perhaps sadly, as if he were saying to himself: "No, the child will never do either what the old folk or what the other folk would have him do; he is not long for here."

Had you questioned him closely, Dr. Hardy would have told you that little Abel was as frail a babe as ever did battle for life. Dr. Hardy would surely never have dared say that to old Dunklee; for in his rapture in the coming of that little boy old Dunklee would have smote the offender who presumed even to intimate that the babe was

not the most vigorous as well as the most beautiful creature upon earth. The old man was simply assotted upon the child,—in a selfish way, undoubtedly, but even this selfish love of that puny little child showed that the old man was capable of somewhat better than his past life had been. To hear him talk you might have fancied that Mrs. Dunklee had no part or parcel or interest in their offspring. It was always “my little boy,”—yes, old Abel Dunklee’s money had a rival in the old man’s heart at last, and that rival was a helpless, shrunken, sickly little babe.

Among his business associates Abel Dunklee was familiarly known as Old Growly, for the reason that his voice was harsh and discordant, and sounded for all the world like the hoarse growling of an ill-natured bear. Abel was not a particularly irritable person, but his slavish devotion to money-getting, his indifference to the amenities of life, his entire neglect of the tender practices of humanity, his rough, unkempt personality, and his deep, hoarse voice,—these things

combined to make that sobriquet of "Old Growly" an exceedingly appropriate one. And presumably Abel never thought of resenting the slur implied therein and thereby; he was too shrewd not to see that, however disrespectful and evil-intentioned the phrase might be, it served him to good purpose; for it conduced to that very general awe, not to say terror, which kept people from bothering him with their charitable and sentimental schemes.

Yes, I think we can accept it as a fact that Abel liked that sobriquet; it meant more money in his pocket, and fewer demands upon his time and patience.

But Old Growly abroad and Old Growly at home were two very different people. Only the voice was the same. The homely, furrowed, wizened face lighted up, and the keen, restless eyes lost their expression of shrewdness, and the thin, bony hands that elsewhere clutched and clutched and pinched and pinched for possession unlimbered themselves in the presence of little Abel, and

reached out their long fingers yearningly and caressingly toward the little child. Then the hoarse voice would growl a salutation that was full of tenderness, for it came straight from the old man's heart; only, had you not known how much he loved the child, you might have thought otherwise, for the old man's voice was always hoarse and discordant, and that was why they called him Old Growly. But what *proved* his love for that puny babe was the fact that every afternoon, when he came home from the factory, Old Growly brought his little boy a dime; and once, when the little fellow had a fever on him from teething, Old Growly brought him a dollar! Next day the tooth came through and the fever left him, but you could not make the old man believe but what it was the dollar that did it all. That was natural, perhaps; for his life had been spent in grubbing for money, and he had not the soul to see that the best and sweetest things in human life are not to be had by riches alone.

As the doctor had in one way and another intimated would be the case, the child did not wax fat and vigorous. Although Old Growly did not seem to see the truth, little Abel grew older only to become what the doctor had foretold, — a cripple. A weakness of the spine was developed, a malady that dwarfed the child's physical growth, giving to his wee face a pinched, starved look, warping his emaciated body, and enfeebling his puny limbs, while at the same time it quickened the intellectual faculties to the degree of precocity. And so two and three and four years went by, little Abel clinging to life with pathetic heroism, and Old Growly loving that little cripple with all the violence of his selfish nature. Never once did it occur to the father that his child might die, that death's seal was already set upon the misshapen little body; on the contrary, Old Growly's thoughts were constantly of little Abel's famous future, of the great fortune he was to fall heir to, of the prosperous business career he was to pursue,

of the influence he was to wield in the world, — of dollars, dollars, dollars, millions of them which little Abel was some time to possess ; these were Old Growly's dreams, and he loved to dream them !

Meanwhile the world did well by the old man ; despising him, undoubtedly, for his avarice and selfishness, but constantly pouring wealth, and more wealth, and ever more wealth into his coffers. As for the old man, he cared not for what the world thought or said, so long as it paid tribute to him ; he wrought on as of old, industriously, shrewdly, hardly, but with this new purpose : to make his little boy happy and great with riches.

Toys and picture-books were vanities in which Old Growly never indulged ; to have expended a farthing for chattels of that character would have seemed to Old Growly like sinful extravagance. The few playthings which little Abel had were such as his mother surreptitiously bought ; the old man believed that a child should be imbued with a proper regard for the value of money from

the very start, so *his* presents were always cash in hand, and he bought a large tin bank for little Abel, and taught the child how to put the copper and silver pieces into it, and he labored diligently to impress upon the child of how great benefit that same money would be to him by and by. Just picture to yourself, if you can, that fond, foolish old man seeking to teach this lesson to that wan-eyed, pinched-face little cripple ! But little Abel took it all very seriously, and was so apt a pupil that Old Growly made great joy and was wont to rub his bony hands gleefully and say to himself: "He has great genius, — this boy of mine, — great genius for finance ! "

But on a day, coming from his factory, Old Growly was stricken with horror to find that during his absence from home a great change had come upon his child. The doctor said it was simply the progress of the disease; that it was a marvel that little Abel had already held out so long; that from the moment of his birth the seal of death had

been set upon him in that cruel malady which had drawn his face and warped his body and limbs. Then all at once Old Growly's eyes seemed to be opened to the truth, and like a lightning flash it came to him that perhaps his pleasant dreams which he had dreamed of his child's future could never be realized. It was a bitter awakening, yet amid it all the old man was full of hope, determination, and battle. He had little faith in drugs and nursing and professional skill; he remembered that upon previous occasions cures had been wrought by means of money; teeth had been brought through, the pangs of colic beguiled, and numerous other ailments to which infancy is heir had by the same specific been baffled. So now Old Growly set about wooing his little boy from the embrace of death, — sought to coax him back to health with money, and the dimes became dollars, and the tin bank was like to burst of fulness. But little Abel drooped and drooped, and he lost all interest in other things, and he was content to lie, drooping-

eyed and listless, in his mother's arms all day. At last the little flame went out with hardly so much as a flutter, and the hope of the house of Dunklee was dissipated forever. But even in those last moments of the little cripple's suffering the father struggled to call back the old look into the fading eyes, and the old smile into the dear, white face. He brought treasure from his vaults and held it up before those fading eyes, and promised it all, all, all — everything he possessed, gold, houses, lands — all he had he would give to that little child if that little child would only live. But the fading eyes saw other things, and the ears that were deaf to the old man's lamentations heard voices that soothed the anguish of that last solemn hour. And so little Abel knew the Mystery.

Then the old man crept away from that vestige of his love, and stood alone in the night, and lifted up his face, and beat his bosom, and moaned at the stars, asking over and over again why he had been so bereaved.

And while he agonized in this wise and cried there came to him a voice, — a voice so small that none else could hear, a voice seemingly from God ; for from infinite space beyond those stars it sped its instantaneous way to the old man's soul and lodged there.

“ Abel, I have touched thy heart ! ”

And so, having come into the darkness of night, old Dunklee went back into the light of day and found life beautiful ; for the touch was in his heart.

After that, Old Growly's way of dealing with the world changed. He had always been an honest man, honest as the world goes. But now he was somewhat better than honest ; he was kind, considerate, merciful. People saw and felt the change, and they knew why it was so. But the pathetic part of it all was that Old Growly would never admit — no, not even to himself — that he was the least changed from his old grinding, hard self. The good deeds he did were not his own ; they were his little boy's, — at least so he said. And it was his whim when doing

some kind and tender thing to lay it to little Abel, of whom he always spoke as if he were still living. His workmen, his neighbors, his townsmen,— all alike felt the graciousness of the wondrous change, and many, ah! many a lowly sufferer blessed that broken old man for succor in little Abel's name. And the old man was indeed much broken: not that he had parted with his shrewdness and acumen, for, as of old, his every venture prospered; but in this particular his mind seemed weakened; that, as I have said, he fancied his child lived, that he was given to low muttering and incoherent mumblings, of which the burden seemed to be that child of his, and that his greatest pleasure appeared now to be watching other little ones at their play. In fact, so changed was he from the Old Growly of former years, that, whereas he had then been wholly indifferent to the presence of those little ones upon earth, he now sought their company, and delighted to view their innocent and mirthful play. And so, presently, the children, from regarding

him at first with distrust, came to confide in and love him, and in due time the old man was known far and wide as Old Grampa Growly, and he was pleased thereat. It was his wont to go every fair day, of an afternoon, into a park hard by his dwelling, and mingle with the crowd of little folk there; and when they were weary of their sports they used to gather about him,—some even clambering upon his knees,—and hear him tell his story, for he had only one story to tell, and that was the story that lay next his heart, —the story ever and forever beginning with, “Once ther’ wuz a littl’ boy.” A very tender little story it was, too, told very much more sweetly than I could ever tell it; for it was of Old Grampa Growly’s own little boy, and it came from that heart in which the touch — the touch of God Himself — lay like a priceless pearl.

So you must know that the last years of the old man’s life made full atonement for those that had gone before. People forgot that the old man had ever been other than

he was now, and of course the children never knew otherwise. But as for himself, Old Grampa Growly grew tenderer and tenderer, and his goodness became a household word, and he was beloved of all. And to the very last he loved the little ones, and shared their pleasures, and sympathized with them in their griefs, but always repeating that same old story, beginning with "Once ther' wuz a littl' boy."

The curious part of it was this: that while he implied by his confidences to the children that his own little boy was dead, he never made that admission to others. On the contrary, it was his wont, as I have said, to speak of little Abel as if that child still lived, and, humoring him in this conceit, it was the custom of the older ones to speak always of that child as if he lived and were known and beloved of all. In this custom the old man had great content and solace. For it was his wish that all he gave to and did for charity's sake should be known to come, not from him, but from Abel, his son,

and this was his express stipulation at all such times. I know whereof I speak, for I was one of those to whom the old man came upon a time and said: "My little boy—Abel, you know—will give me no peace till I do what he requires. He has this sum of money which he has saved in his bank, count it yourselves, it is \$50,000, and he bids me give it to the townsfolk for a hospital, one for little lame boys and girls. And I have promised him—my little boy, Abel, you know—that I will give \$50,000 more. You shall have it when that hospital is built." Surely enough, in eighteen months' time the old man handed us the rest of the money, and when we told him that the place was to be called the Abel Dunklee hospital he was sorely distressed, and shook his head, and said: "No, no,—not *my* name! Call it the *Little* Abel hospital, for little Abel—my boy, you know—has done it all."

The old man lived many years, —lived to hear tender voices bless him, and to see pale faces brighten at the sound of his footfall.

Yes, for many years the quaint, shuffling figure moved about our streets, and his hoarse but kindly voice—oh, very kindly now!—was heard repeating to the children that pathetic old story of “Once ther wuz a litt’ boy.” And where the dear old feet trod the grass grew greenest, and the sunbeams nestled. But at last there came a summons for the old man,—a summons from away off yonder,—and the old man heard it and went thither.

The doctor—himself hoary and stooping now—told me that toward the last Old Grampa Growly sunk into a sort of sleep, or stupor, from which they could not rouse him. For many hours he lay like one dead, but his thin, creased face was very peaceful, and there was no pain. Children tiptoed in with flowers, and some cried bitterly, while others—those who were younger—whispered to one another: “Hush, let us make no noise; Old Grampa Growly is sleeping.”

At last the old man roused up. He had lain like one dead for many hours, but now

at last he seemed to wake of a sudden, and, seeing children about him, perhaps he fancied himself in that pleasant park, under the trees, where so very often he had told his one pathetic story to those little ones. Leastwise he made a feeble motion as if he would have them gather nearer, and, seeming to know his wish, the children came closer to him. Those who were nearest heard him say with the ineffable tenderness of old: "Once ther' wuz a littl' boy — "

And with those last sweet words upon his lips, and with the touch in his heart, the old man went down into the Valley.

VI.

DANIEL AND THE DEVIL.



DANIEL was a very wretched man. As he sat with his head bowed upon his desk that evening he made up his mind that his life had been a failure.

“I have labored long and diligently,” said he to himself, “and although I am known throughout the city as an industrious and shrewd business-man, I am still a poor man, and shall probably continue so to the end of my days unless — unless — ”

Here Daniel stopped and shivered. For a week or more he had been brooding over

his unhappy lot. There seemed to be but one way out of his trouble, yet his soul revolted from taking that step. That was why he stopped and shivered.

“But,” he argued, “I *must* do something! My nine children are growing up into big boys and girls. They must have those advantages which my limited means will not admit of! All my life so far has been pure, circumspect, and rigid; poverty has at last broken my spirit. I give up the fight,—I am ready to sell my soul to the Devil!”

“The determination is a wise one,” said a voice at Daniel’s elbow. Daniel looked up and beheld a grim-visaged stranger in the chair beside him. The stranger was arrayed all in black, and he exhaled a distinct odor of sulphur.

“Am I to understand,” asked the stranger, “that you are prepared to enter into a league with the Devil?”

“Yes,” said Daniel, firmly; and he set his teeth together after the fashion of a man who is not to be moved from his purpose.

“Then I am ready to treat with you,” said the stranger.

“Are you the Devil?” asked Daniel, eying the stranger critically.

“No, but I am authorized to enter into contracts for him,” explained the stranger. “My name is Beelzebub, and I am my master’s most trusted agent.”

“Sir,” said Daniel, “you must pardon me (for I am loath to wound your feelings), but one of the rules governing my career as a business-man has been to deal directly with principals, and never to trust to the offices of middlemen. The affair now in hand is one concerning the Devil and myself, and between us two and by us two only can the preliminaries be adjusted.”

“As it so happens,” explained Beelzebub, “this is Friday,—commonly called hangman’s day,—and that is as busy a time in our particular locality as a Monday is in a laundry, or as the first of every month is at a book-keeper’s desk. You can understand, perhaps, that this is the Devil’s busy day;

therefore be content to make this deal with me, and you will find that my master will cheerfully accept any contract I may enter into as his agent and in his behalf."

But no, — Daniel would not agree to this ; with the Devil himself, and only the Devil himself, would he treat. So he bade Beelzebub go to the Devil and make known his wishes. Beelzebub departed, much chagrined. Presently back came the Devil, and surely it *was* the Devil this time, — there could be no mistake about it ; for he wore a scarlet cloak, and had cloven feet, and carried about with him as many suffocating smells as there are kinds of brimstone, sulphur, and assa-fœtida.

The two talked over all Daniel's miseries ; the Devil sympathized with Daniel, and ever and anon a malodorous, gummy tear would trickle down the Devil's sinister nose and drop off on the carpet.

"What you want is money," said the Devil. "That will give you the comfort and the contentment you crave."

“Yes,” said Daniel; “it will give me every opportunity to do good.”

“To do good!” repeated the Devil. “To do good, indeed! Yes, it’s many a good time we shall have together, friend Daniel! Ha, ha, ha!” And the Devil laughed uproariously. Nothing seemed more humorous than the prospect of “doing good” with the Devil’s money! But Daniel failed to see what the Devil was so jolly about. Daniel was not a humorist; he was, as we have indicated, a plain business-man.

It was finally agreed that Daniel should sell his soul to the Devil upon condition that for the space of twenty-four years the Devil should serve Daniel faithfully, should provide him with riches, and should do whatsoever he was commanded to do; then, at the end of the twenty-fourth year, Daniel’s soul was to pass into the possession of the Devil, and was to remain there forever, without recourse or benefit of clergy. Surely a more horrible contract was never entered into!

“You will have to sign your name to this

contract," said the Devil, producing a sheet of asbestos paper upon which all the terms of the diabolical treaty were set forth exactly.

"Certainly," replied Daniel. "I have been a business-man long enough to know the propriety and necessity of written contracts. And as for you, you must of course give a bond for the faithful execution of your part of this business."

"That is something I have never done before," suggested the Devil.

"I shall insist upon it," said Daniel, firmly. "This is no affair of sentiment; it is strictly and coldly business: you are to do certain service, and are to receive certain rewards therefor — "

"Yes, your soul!" cried the Devil, gleefully rubbing his callous hands together. "Your soul in twenty-four years!"

"Yes," said Daniel. "Now, no contract is good unless there is a quid pro quo."

"That's so," said the Devil, "so let's get a lawyer to draw up the paper for me to sign."

"Why a lawyer?" queried Daniel. "A

contract is a simple instrument; I, as a business-man, can frame one sufficiently binding."

"But I prefer to have a lawyer do it," urged the Devil.

"And *I* prefer to do it myself," said Daniel.

When a business-man once gets his mind set, not even an Archimedean lever could stir it. So Daniel drew up the bond for the Devil to sign, and this bond specified that in case the Devil failed at any time during the next twenty-four years to do whatso Daniel commanded him, then should the bond which the Devil held against Daniel become null and void, and upon that same day should a thousand and one souls be released forever from the Devil's dominion. The Devil winced; he hated to sign this agreement, but he had to. An awful clap of thunder ratified the abominable treaty, and every black cat within a radius of a hundred leagues straightway fell to frothing and to yowling grotesquely.

Presently Daniel began to prosper; the Devil was a faithful slave, and he served

Daniel so artfully that no person on earth suspected that Daniel had leagued with the evil one. Daniel had the finest house in the city, his wife dressed magnificently, and his children enjoyed every luxury wealth could provide. Still, Daniel was content to be known as a business-man ; he deported himself modestly and kindly ; he pursued with all his old-time diligence the trade which in earlier days he had found so unproductive of riches. His indifference to the pleasures which money put within his reach was passing strange, and it caused the Devil vast uneasiness.

“ Daniel,” said the Devil, one day, “ you’re not getting out of this thing all the fun there is in it. You go poking along in the same old rut with never a suspicion that you have it in your power to enjoy every pleasure of human life. Why don’t you break away from the old restraints ? Why don’t you avail yourself of the advantages at your command ? ”

“ I know what you’re driving at,” said Daniel, shrewdly, “ Politics ! ”

“No, not at all,” remonstrated the Devil. “What I mean is fun, — gayety. Why not have a good time, Daniel?”

“But I *am* having a good time,” said Daniel. “My business is going along all right, I am rich. I’ve got a lovely home; my wife is happy; my children are healthy and contented; I am respected, — what more could I ask? What better time could I demand?”

“You don’t understand me,” explained the Devil. “What I mean by a good time is that which makes the heart merry and keeps the soul youthful and buoyant, — wine, Daniel! Wine and the theatre and pretty girls and fast horses and all that sort of happy, joyful life!”

“Tut, tut, tut!” cried Daniel; “no more of that, sir! I sowed my wild oats in college. What right have I to think of such silly follies, — I, at forty years of age, and a business-man too?”

So not even the Devil himself could persuade Daniel into a life of dissipation. All

you who have made a study of the business-man will agree that of all human beings he is the hardest to swerve from conservative methods. The Devil groaned and began to wonder why he had ever tied up to a man like Daniel,— a business-man.

Pretty soon Daniel developed an ambition. He wanted reputation, and he told the Devil so. The Devil's eyes sparkled. "At last," murmured the Devil, with a sigh of relief,— "at last!"

"Yes," said Daniel, "I want to be known far and wide. You must build a church for me"

"What!" shrieked the Devil. And the Devil's tail stiffened up like a sore thumb.

"Yes," said Daniel, calmly; "you must build a church for me, and it must be the largest and the handsomest church in the city. The sittings shall be free, and you shall provide the funds for its support forever."

The Devil frothed at his mouth, and blue fire issued from his ears and nostrils. He was the maddest devil ever seen on earth.

“I won’t do it!” roared the Devil. “Do you suppose I’m going to spend my time building churches and stultifying myself just for the sake of gratifying your idle whims? I won’t do it, — never!”

“Then the bond I gave is null and void,” said Daniel.

“Take your old bond,” said the Devil, petulantly.

“But the bond you gave is operative,” continued Daniel. “So release the thousand and one souls you owe me when you refuse to obey me.”

“Oh, Daniel!” whimpered the Devil, “how can you treat me so? Have n’t I always been good to you? Haven’t I given you riches and prosperity? Does no sentiment of friendship — ”

“Hush,” said Daniel, interrupting him. “I have already told you a thousand times that our relations were simply those of one business-man with another. It now behooves you to fulfil your part of our compact; eventually I shall fulfil mine. Come, now, to

business! Will you or will you not keep your word and save your bond?"

The Devil was sorely put to his trumps. But when it came to releasing a thousand and one souls from hell,—ah, that staggered him! He had to build the church, and a noble one it was too. Then he endowed the church, and finally he built a parsonage; altogether it was a stupendous work, and Daniel got all the credit for it. The preacher whom Daniel installed in this magnificent temple was severely orthodox, and one of the first things he did was to preach a series of sermons upon the personality of the Devil, wherein he inveighed most bitterly against that person and his work.

By and by Daniel made the Devil endow and build a number of hospitals, charity schools, free baths, libraries, and other institutions of similar character. Then he made him secure the election of honest men to office and of upright judges to the bench. It almost broke the Devil's heart to do it, but the Devil was prepared to do almost anything

else than forfeit his bond and give up those one thousand and one souls. By this time Daniel came to be known far and wide for his philanthropy and his piety. This gratified him of course; but most of all he gloried in the circumstance that he was a business-man.

“Have you anything for me to do to-day?” asked the Devil, one morning. He had grown to be a very meek and courteous devil; steady employment in righteous causes had chastened him to a degree and purged away somewhat of the violence of his nature. On this particular morning he looked haggard and ill,—yes, and he looked, too, as blue as a whetstone.

“I am not feeling robust,” explained the Devil. “To tell the truth, I am somewhat ill.”

“I am sorry to hear it,” said Daniel; “but as I am not conducting a sanitarium, I can do nothing further than express my regret that you are ailing. Of course our business relations do not contemplate any interchange

of sympathies ; still I 'll go easy with you to-day. You may go up to the house and look after the children ; see that they don't smoke cigarettes, or quarrel, or tease the cat, or do anything out of the way."

Now that was fine business for the Devil to be in ; but how could the Devil help himself ? He was wholly at Daniel's mercy. He went groaning about the humiliating task.

The crash came at last. It was when the Devil informed Daniel one day that he was n't going to work for him any more.

" You have ruined my business," said the Devil, wearily. " A committee of imps waited upon me last night and told me that unless I severed my connection with you a permanent suspension of my interests down yonder would be necessitated. While I have been running around doing your insane errands my personal business has gone to the dogs, — I would n't be at all surprised if I were to have to get a new plant altogether. Meanwhile my reputation has suffered ; I am not longer respected, and the number of my recruits is

daily becoming smaller. I give up,—I can make no further sacrifice."

"Then you are prepared to forfeit your bond?" asked Daniel.

"Not by any means," replied the Devil. "I propose to throw the matter into the courts."

"That will hardly be to your interest," said Daniel, "since, as you well know, we have recently elected honest men to the bench, and, as I recollect, most of our judges are members in good standing of the church we built some years ago!"

The Devil howled with rage. Then, presently, he began to whimper.

"For the last time," expostulated Daniel, "let me remind you that sentiment does not enter into this affair at all. We are simply two business parties co-operating in a business scheme. Our respective duties are exactly defined in the bonds we hold. You keep your contract and I'll keep mine. Let me see, I still have a margin of thirteen years."

The Devil groaned and writhed.

"They call me a dude," whimpered the Devil.

"Who do?" asked Daniel.

"Beelzebub and the rest," said the Devil. "I have been trotting around doing pious errands so long that I've lost all my sulphur-and-brimstone flavor, and now I smell like spikenard and myrrh."

"Pooh!" said Daniel.

"Well, I do," insisted the Devil. "You've humiliated me so that I hain't got any more ambition. Yes, Daniel, you've worked me shamefully hard!"

"Well," said Daniel, "I have a very distinct suspicion that when, thirteen years hence, I fall into your hands I shall not enjoy what might be called a sedentary life."

The Devil plucked up at this suggestion. "Indeed you shall not," he muttered. "I'll make it hot for you!"

"But come, we waste time," said Daniel. "I am a man of business and I cannot fritter away the precious moments parleying with

you. I have important work for you. Tomorrow is Sunday; you are to see that all the saloons are kept closed."

"I sha'n't, — I won't!" yelled the Devil.

"But you must," said Daniel, firmly.

"Do you really expect me to do *that?*" roared the Devil. "Do you fancy that I am so arrant a fool as to shut off the very feeders whereby my hungry hell is supplied? That would be suicidal!"

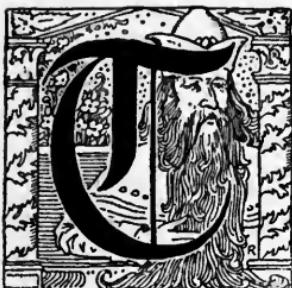
"I don't know anything about that," said Daniel, "I am a business-man, and by this business arrangement of ours it is explicitly stipulated — "

"I don't care what the stipulations are!" shrieked the Devil. "I 'm through with you, and may I be consumed by my own fires if ever again I have anything to do with a business-man!"

The upshot of it all was that the Devil forfeited his bond, and by this act Daniel was released from every obligation unto the Devil, and one thousand and one souls were ransomed from the torture of the infernal fires.

VII.

METHUSELAH.



HE discussion now going on between our clergymen and certain unbelievers touching the question of Cain and his wife will surely result beneficially, for it will set everybody to reading his Bible more diligently. Still, the biography of Cain is one that we could never become particularly interested in; in short, of all the Old Testament characters none other interests us so much as does Methuselah, the man who lived 969 years. Would it be possible to find in all history another life at once so grand and so pathetic? One can get a faint idea of the awful magnitude of

Methuselah's career by pausing to recollect that 969 years represent 9.69 centuries, 96 decades, 11,628 months, 50,388 weeks, 353,928 days, 8,494,272 hours, 521,656,320 minutes, and 36,299,879,200 seconds !

How came he to live so long ? Ah, that is easily enough explained. He loved life and the world,— both were beautiful to him. And one day he spoke his wish in words. “Oh, that I might live a thousand years ! ” he cried.

Then looking up straightway he beheld an angel, and the angel said : “Wouldst thou live a thousand years ? ”

And Methuselah answered him, saying : “As the Lord is my God, I would live a thousand years.”

“It shall be even so,” said the angel ; and then the angel departed out of his sight. So Methuselah lived on and on, as the angel had promised.

How sweet a treasure the young Methuselah must have been to his parents and to his doting ancestors ; with what tender solic-

itude must the old folks have watched the child's progress from the innocence of his first to the virility of his later centuries. We can picture the happy reunions of the old Adam family under the domestic vines and fig-trees that bloomed near the Euphrates. When Methuselah was a mere toddler of nineteen years, Adam was still living, and so was his estimable wife; the possibility is that the venerable couple gave young Methuselah a birthday party at which (we can easily imagine) there were present these following, to-wit: Adam, aged 687; Seth, aged 557; Enos, aged 452; Cainan, aged 362; Mahalaleel, aged 292; Jared, aged 227; Enoch, aged 65, and his infant boy Methuselah, aged 19. Here were represented eight direct generations, and there were present, of course, the wives and daughters; so that, on the whole, the gathering must have been as numerous as it was otherwise remarkable. Nowhere in any of the vistas of history, of romance, or of mythology were it possible to find a spectacle more impos-

ing than that of the child Methuselah surrounded by his father Enoch, his grandfather Jared, his great-grandfather Mahalaleel, his great-great-grandfather Cainan, his great-great-great-grandfather Enos, his great-great-great-great-grandfather Seth, and his great-great-great-great-grandfather Adam, as well as by his great-great-great-great-grandmother Eve, and her feminine posterity for (say) four centuries! How pretty and how kindly dear old grandma Eve must have looked on that gala occasion, attired, as she must have been, in all the quaint simplicity of that primeval period; and how must the dear old soul have fretted through fear that little Methuselah would eat too many pawpaws, or drink too much goat's milk. It is a marvel, we think, that in spite of the indulgence and the petting in which he was reared, Methuselah grew to be a good, kind man.

Profane historians agree that just about the time he reached the age of ninety-four Methuselah became deeply enamoured of a

comely and sprightly damsel named Mizpah, — a young thing scarce turned seventy-six. Up to this period of adolescence his cautious father Enoch had kept Methuselah out of all love entanglements, and it is probable that he would not have approved of this affair with Mizpah had not Jared, the boy's grandfather, counselled Enoch to give the boy a chance. But alas and alackaday for the instability of youthful affection! It befell in an evil time that there came over from the land of Nod a frivolous and gorgeously apparelled beau, who, with finely wrought phrases, did so fascinate the giddy Mizpah that incontinently she gave Methuselah the mitten, and went with the dashing young stranger of 102 as his bride.

This shocking blow so grievously affected Methuselah that for some time (that is to say, for a period of ninety-one years) he shunned female society. But having recovered somewhat from the bitterness of that great disappointment received in the callowness of his ninth decade, he finally met and

fell in love with Adah, a young woman of 148, and her he married. The issue of this union was a boy whom they named Lamech, and this child from the very hour of his birth gave his father vast worriment, which, considering the disparity in their ages, is indeed most shocking of contemplation. The tableau of a father (aged 187) vainly coddling a colicky babe certainly does not call for our enthusiasm. Yet we presume to say that Methuselah bore his trials meekly, that he cherished and adored the baby, and that he spent weeks and months playing peek-a-boo and ride-a-cock-horse. In all our consideration of Methuselah we must remember that the mere matter of time was of no consequence to him.

Lamech grew to boyhood, involving his father in all those ridiculous complications which parents nowadays do not heed so much, but which must have been of vast annoyance to a man of Methuselah's advanced age and proper notions. Whittling with the old gentleman's razor, hooking off from

school, trampling down the neighbors' rowen, tracking mud into the front parlor — these were some of Lamech's idiosyncrasies, and of course they tormented Methuselah, who recalled sadly that boys were no longer what they used to be when he was a boy some centuries previous. But when he got to be 182 years old Lamech had sowed all his wild oats, and it was then he married a clever young girl of 98, who bore him a son whom they called Noah. Now if Methuselah had been worried and plagued by Lamech, he was more than compensated therefor by this baby grandson whom he found to be, aside from all prejudices, the prettiest and the smartest child he had ever seen. Old father Adam, who was now turned of his ninth century, tottered over to see the baby, and he, too, allowed that it was an uncommonly bright child. And dear old grandma Eve declared that there was an expression about the upper part of the little Noah's face that reminded her very much of the soft-eyed boy she lost 800 years ago. And dear old grandma

Eve used to rock little Noah and sing to him, and cry softly to herself all the while.

Now, in good time, Noah grew to lusty youth, and although he was, on the whole, a joy to his grandsire Methuselah, he developed certain traits and predilections that occasioned the old gentleman much uneasiness. At the tender age of 265 Noah exhibited a strange passion for aquatics, and while it was common for other boys of that time to divert themselves with the flocks and herds, with slingshots and spears, with music and dancing, Noah preferred to spend his hours floating toy-ships in the bayous of the Euphrates. Every day he took his little shittim-wood boats down to the water, tied strings to them, and let them float hither and thither on the crystal bosom of the tide. Naturally enough these practices worried the grandfather mightily.

“ May not the crocodiles compass him round about? ” groaned Methuselah. “ May not behemoth prevail against him? Or, verily, it may befall that the waves shall de-

vour him. Woe is me and lamentation unto this household if destruction come to him through the folly of his fathers!"

So Methuselah's age began to be full of care and trouble, and many a time he felt weary of living, and sometimes — yes, sometimes — he wished he were dead. People in those times were not afraid to die; they believed in the second and better life, because God spoke with them and told them it should be.

The last century of this good man's sojourn upon earth was particularly pathetic. His ancestors were all dead; he alone remained the last living reminiscence of a time that but for him would have been forgotten. Deprived of the wise counsels of his great-great-great-great-grandfather Adam and of the gentle admonitions of his great-great-great-great-grandmother Eve, Methuselah felt not only lonesome but even in danger of wrong-doing, so precious to him had been the teachings of these worthy progenitors. And what particularly disturbed

Methuselah were the dreadful changes that had taken place in society since he was a boy. Dress, speech, customs, and morals were all different now from what they used to be.

When Methuselah was a boy, — ah, he remembered it well, — people went hither and thither clad only in simple fig-leaf garb, and they were content therewith.

When Methuselah was a boy, people spoke a plain, direct language, strong in its truth, its simplicity, and its honest vigor.

When Methuselah was a boy, manners were open and unaffected, and morals were pure and healthy.

But now all these things were changed. An evil called fashion had filled the minds of men and women with vanity. From the sinful land of Nod and from other pagan countries came divers tradesmen with purples and linens and fine feathers, whereby a wicked pride was engendered, and from these sinful countries, too, came frivolous manners that supplanted the guileless etiquette of the past.

Moreover, traffic and intercourse with the subtle heathen had corrupted and perverted the speech of Adam's time ; crafty phrases and false rhetorics had crept in, and the grand old Edenic idioms either were fast being debased or had become wholly obsolete. Such new-fangled words as "eftsoon," "albeit," "wench," "soothly," "zounds," "whenas," and "sithence" had stolen into common usage, making more direct and simpler speech a jest and a byword.

Likewise had prudence given way to extravagance, abstemiousness to intemperance, dignity to frivolity, and continence to lust ; so that by these evils was Methuselah grievously tormented, and it repented him full sore that he had lived to see such exceeding wickedness upon earth. But in the midst of all these follies did Methuselah maintain an upright and godly life, and continually did he bless God for that he had held him in the path of rectitude.

Now when Methuselah was in the 964th summer of his sojourn he was called upon to

mourn the death of his son Lamech, whom an inscrutable Providence had cut off in what in those days was considered the flower of a man's life,—namely, the eighth century thereof. Lamech's untimely decease was a severe blow to his doting father, who, forgetting all his son's boyish indiscretions remembered now only Lamech's good and lovable traits and deeds. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that the old gentleman was somewhat beguiled from his grief by the lively dispositions and playful antics of Lamech's grandsons, Noah's sons, and his own great-grandsons,—Shem, Ham, and Japheth,—who at this time had attained to the frolicsome ages of ninety-five, ninety-two, and ninety-one, respectively. These boys inherited from their father a violent penchant for aquatics, and scarcely a day passed that they did not paddle around the bayous and sloughs of the Euphrates in their gopher-wood canoes.

“Gran’pa,” Noah used to say, “the conduct of those boys causes me constant vexa-

tion. I have no time to follow them around, and I am haunted continually by the fear that they will be drowned, or that the crocodiles will get them if they don't watch out!"

But Methuselah would smiling answer: " Possess thy soul in patience and thy bowels in peace; for verily is it not written 'boys will be boys !'"

Now Shem, Ham, and Japheth were very fond of their great-grandpa, and to their credit be it said that next to paddling over the water privileges of the Euphrates they liked nothing better than to sit in the old gentleman's lap, and to hear him talk about old times. Marvellous tales he told them, too; for his career of nine and a half centuries had been well stocked with incident, as one would naturally suppose. Howbeit, the admiration which these callow youths had for Methuselah was not shared by a large majority of the people then on earth. On the contrary, we blush to admit it, Methuselah was held in very trifling esteem by his frivolous fellow-citizens, who habitually referred to him

as an “old wayback,” “a barnacle,” an “old fogey,” a “mossback,” or a “garrulous dotard,” and with singular irreverence they took delight in twitting him upon his senility and in pestering him with divers new-fangled notions altogether distasteful, not to say shocking, to a gentleman of his years.

It was perhaps, however, at the old settlers’ picnics, which even then were of annual occurrence, that Methuselah most enjoyed himself; for on these occasions he was given the place of prominence and he was deferred to in everything, since he antedated all the others by at least three centuries. The historians and the antiquarians of the time found him of much assistance to them in their labors, since he was always ready to provide them with dates touching incidents of the remote period from which he had come down unscathed. He remembered vividly how, when he was 186 years of age, the Euphrates had frozen over to a depth of seven feet; the 209th winter of his existence he referred to as “the winter of the deep snow;” he re-

membered that when he was a boy the women had more character than the women of these later years; he had a vivid recollection of the great plague that prevailed in the city of Enoch during his fourth century; he could repeat, word for word, the address of welcome his great-great-great-great grandfather Adam delivered to an excursion party that came over from the land of Nod one time when Methuselah was a mere child of eighty-seven,—oh, yes, poor old Methuselah was full of reminiscence, and having crowded an active career into the brief period of 969 years, it can be imagined that ponderous tomes would not hold the tales he told whenever he was encouraged.

One day, however, Methuselah's grandson Noah took the old gentleman aside and confided into his ear-trumpet a very solemn secret which must have grieved the old gentleman immensely, for he gnashed his gums and wrung his thin, bony hands and groaned dolorously.

“The end of all flesh is at hand,” said

Noah. "The earth is filled with violence through them, and God will destroy them with the earth. I will make an ark of gopher wood, the length thereof 300 cubits, the breadth of it 50 cubits, and the height of it 30 cubits, and I will pitch it within and without with pitch. Into the ark will I come, and my sons and my wife, and my sons' wives, and certain living beasts shall come, and birds of the air, and we and they shall be saved. Come thou also, for thou art an austere man and a just."

But as Methuselah sate alone upon his couch that night he thought of his life: how sweet it had been,— how that, despite the evil now and then, there had been more of happiness than of sorrow in it. He even forgot the wickedness of the world and remembered only its good and its sunshine, its kindness and its love. He blessed God for it all, and he prayed for the death-angel to come to him ere he beheld the destruction of all he so much loved.

Then the angel came and spread his shadow about the old man.

And the angel said: “Thy prayer is heard, and God doth forgive thee the score-and-ten years of the promised span of thy life.”

And Methuselah gathered up his feet into the bed, and prattling of the brooks, he fell asleep; and so he slept with his fathers.

VIII.

FÉLICE AND PETIT-POULAIN.



HE name was singularly appropriate, for assuredly Félice was the happiest of all four-footed creatures. Her nature was gentle; she was obedient, long-suffering, kind. She had known what it was to toil and to bear burdens; sometimes she had suffered from hunger and from thirst; and before she came into the possession of Jacques she had been beaten, for Pierre, her former owner, was a hard master. But Félice was always a kind, faithful, and gentle creature; presumably that was why they named her that pretty name, Félice. She may not have been happy when

Pierre owned and overworked and starved and beat her; that does not concern us now, for herein it is to tell of that time when she belonged to Jacques, and Jacques was a merciful man.

Jacques was a farmer; he lived a short distance from Cinqville, which, as you are probably aware, is a town of considerable importance upon what used to be the boundary line between France and Germany. The country round about is devoted to agriculture. You can fancy that, with its even roads, leafy woods, quiet lanes, velvety paddocks, tall hedges, and bountiful fields, this country was indeed as pleasant a home as Félice—or, for that matter, any other properly minded horse—could hope for. Toward the southern horizon there were hills that looked a grayish blue from a distance; upon these hills were vineyards, and the wine that came therefrom is very famous wine, as your uncle, if he be a club man, will very truly assure you. There was a pretty little river that curled like a silver snake through the fertile

meadows, and lost its way among the hills, and there were many tiny brooks that scampered across lots and got tangled up with that pretty little river in most bewildering fashion. So, as you can imagine, this was a fair country, and you do not wonder that, with so merciful a master as Jacques, our friend Félice was happy.

But what perfected her happiness was the coming of her little colt, as cunning and as blithe a creature as ever whisked a tail or galloped on four legs. I do not know why they called him by that name, but Petit-Poulain was what they called him, and that name seemed to please Félice, for when farmer Jacques came thrice a day to the stile and cried, “Petit-Poulain, petit, petit, Petit-Poulain!” the kind old mother would look up fondly, and, with doting eyes, watch her dainty little colt go bounding toward his calling master. And he was indeed a lovely little fellow. The curé, the holy père François, predicted that in due time that colt would make a great name for himself and a

great fortune for his owner. The holy père knew whereof he spake, for in his youth he had tasted of the sweets of Parisian life, and upon one memorable occasion had successfully placed ten francs upon the winner of le grand prix. We can suppose that Félice thought well of the holy père. He never came down the road that she did not thrust her nose through the hedge and give a mild whinny of recognition, as if she fain would say: "Pray stop a moment and see Petit-Poulain and his old mother!"

What happy days those were for Félice and her darling colt. With what tenderness they played together in the paddock; or, when the sky was overcast and a storm came on, with what solicitude would the old mother lead the way into the thatched stable, where there was snug protection against the threatening element. There are those who say that none but human-kind is immortal,—that none but man has a soul. I do not make or believe that claim. There is that within me which tells me that no thing in

this world and life of ours which has felt the grace of maternity shall utterly perish. And this I say in all reverence, and with the hope that I offend neither God nor man.

You are to know that old Félice's devotion to Petit-Poulain was human in its tenderness. As readily, as gladly, and as surely as your dear mother would lay down her life for you would old Félice have yielded up her life for her innocent, blithe darling. So old Félice was happy that pleasant time in that fair country, and Petit-Poulain waxed hale and evermore blithe and beautiful.

Happy days, too, were those for that peaceful country and the other dwellers therein. There was no thought of evil there; the seasons were propitious, the vineyards thrived, the crops were bountiful; as far as eye could see all was prosperity and contentment. But one day the holy Father François came hurrying down the road, and it was too evident that he brought evil tidings. Félice thought it very strange that he paid no heed to her when, as was her wont, she

thrust her nose through the hedge and gave a mild whinny of welcome. Anon she saw that he talked long and earnestly with her master Jacques, and presently she saw that Jacques went into the cottage and came again therefrom with his wife Justine and kissed her, and then went away with Père François toward the town off yonder. Félice saw that Justine was weeping, and with never a suspicion of impending evil, she wondered why Justine should weep when all was so prosperous and bright and fair and happy about her. Félice saw and wondered, and meanwhile Petit-Poulain scampered gayly about that velvety paddock.

That night the vineyard hills, bathed in the mellow grace of moonlight, saw a sight they had never seen before. From the east an army came riding and marching on,—an army of strange, determined men, speaking a language before unheard in that fair country and threatening things of which that peaceful valley had never dreamed. You and I, of course, know that these were the Germans

advancing upon France,—a nation of immortals eager to destroy the possessions and the human lives of fellow-immortals! But old Félice, hearing the din away off yonder,—the unwonted noise of cavalry and infantry advancing with murderous intent,—she did not understand it all, she did not even suspect the truth. You cannot wonder, for what should a soulless beast know of the noble, the human privilege of human slaughter? Old Félice heard that strange din, and instinct led her to coax her little colt from the pleasant paddock into that snug and secure retreat, the thatched stable, and there, in the early morning, they found her, Petit-Poulain pulling eagerly at her generous dugs.

Those who came riding up were strangers in those parts; they were ominously accoutred and they spoke words that old Félice had never heard before. Yes, as you have already guessed, they were German cavalry-men. A battle was impending, and they needed more horses.

“Old enough; but in lieu of a better, she

will do." That was what they said. They approached her carefully, for they suspected that she might be vicious. Poor old Félice, she had never harmed even the flies that pestered her. "They are going to put me at the plough," she thought. "It is a long time since I did work of any kind,—nothing, in fact, since Petit-Poulain was born. Poor Petit-Poulain will miss me; but I will soon return." With these thoughts she turned her head fondly and caressed her pretty colt.

"The colt must be tied in the stall or he will follow her." So said the cavalrymen. They threw a rope about his neck and made him fast in the stable. Petit-Poulain was very much surprised, and he remonstrated vainly with his fierce little heels.

They put a halter upon old Félice. Justine, the farmer's wife, met them in the yard, and reproached them wildly in French. They laughed boisterously, and answered her in German. Then they rode away, leading old Félice, who kept turning her head and whinnying pathetically, for she was thinking of Petit-Poulain.

Of peace I know and can speak,—of peace, with its solace of love, plenty, honor, fame, happiness, and its pathetic tragedy of poverty, heartache, disappointment, tears, bereavement. Of war I know nothing, and never shall know; it is not in my heart or for my hand to break that law which God enjoined from Sinai and Christ confirmed in Galilee. I do not know of war, nor can I tell you of that battle which men with immortal souls fought one glorious day in a fertile country with vineyard hills all round about. But when night fell there was desolation everywhere and death. The Eden was a wilderness; the winding river was choked with mangled corpses; shell and shot had mowed down the acres of waving grain, the exuberant orchards, the gardens and the hedgerows; black, charred ruins, gaunt and ghostlike, marked the spots where homes had stood. The vines had been cut and torn away, and the despoiled hills seemed to crouch down like bereaved mothers under the pitiless gaze of the myriad eyes of heaven.

The victors went their way; a greater triumph was in store for them; a mighty capital was to be besieged; more homes were to be desolated,— more blood shed, more hearts broken. So the victors went their way, their hands red and their immortal souls elated.

In the early dawn a horse came galloping homeward. It is Félice, old Félice, riderless, splashed with mud, wild-eyed, sore with fatigue! Félice, Félice, what horrors hast thou not seen! If thou couldst speak, if that tongue of thine could be loosed, what would it say of those who, forgetful of their souls, sink lower than the soulless brutes! Better it is thou canst not speak; the anguish in thine eyes, the despair in thy honest heart, the fear, the awful fear in thy mother breast,— what tongue could utter them?

Adown the road she galloped,— the same road she had traversed, perhaps, a thousand times before, yet it was so changed now she hardly knew it. Twenty-four hours had ruthlessly levelled the noble trees, the hedgerows, and the fields of grain. Twenty-four hours

of battle had done all this and more. In all those ghastly hours, one thought had haunted Félice ; one thought alone, — the thought of Petit-Poulain ! She pictured him tied in that far-away stall, wondering why she did not come. He was hungry, she knew ; her dugs were full of milk and they pained her ; how sweet would be her relief when her Petit-Poulain broke his long fast. Petit-Poulain, Petit-Poulain, Petit-Poulain, — this one thought and this alone had old Félice throughout those hours of battle and of horror.

Could this have been the farm-house ? It was a ruin now. Shells had torn it apart. Where was the good master Jacques ; had he gone with the curé to the defence of the town ? And Justine, — where was she ? Bullets had cut away the rose-trees and the smoke-bush ; the garden was no more. The havoc, the desolation, was complete. The cote, which had surmounted the pole around which an ivy twined, had been swept away. The pigeons now circled here and there be-

wildered ; wondering, perhaps, why Justine did not come and call to them and feed them.

To this seared, scarred spot came old Félice. He that had ridden her into battle lay with his face downward near those distant vineyard hills. His blood had stained Félice's neck ; a bullet had grazed her flank, but that was a slight wound,—riderless, she turned and came from the battlefield and sought her Petit-Poulain once again.

Hard by the ruins of cottage, of garden, and of cote, she came up standing ; she was steaming and breathless. She rolled her eyes wildly around,—she looked for the stable where she had left Petit-Poulain. She trembled as if an overwhelming apprehension of disaster suddenly possessed her. She gave a whinny, pathetic in its tenderness. She was calling Petit-Poulain. But there was no answer.

Petit-Poulain lay dead in the ruins of the stable. His shelter had not escaped the fury of the battle. He could not run away, for

they had tied him fast when they carried his old mother off. So now he lay amid that debris, his eyes half open in death and his legs stretched out stark and stiff.

And old Félice, — her udder bursting with the maternal grace he never again should know, and her heart breaking with the agony of sudden and awful bereavement, — she staggered, as if blinded by despair, toward that vestige of her love, and bent over him and caressed her Petit-Poulain.

IX.

THE RIVER.



NCE upon a time a little boy came, during his play, to the bank of a river. The waters of the river were very dark and wild, and there was so black a cloud over the river that the little boy could not see the further shore. An icy wind came up from the cloud and chilled the little boy, and he trembled with cold and fear as the wind smote his cheeks and ran its slender, icicle fingers through his yellow curls. An old man sat on the bank of the river; he was very, very old; his head and shoulders were covered with a black mantle; and his beard was white as snow.

"Will you come with me, little boy?" asked the old man.

"Where?" inquired the little boy.

"To yonder shore," replied the old man.

"Oh, no; not to that dark shore," said the little boy. "I should be afraid to go."

"But think of the sunlight always there," said the old man, "the birds and flowers; and remember there is no pain, nor anything of that kind to vex you."

The little boy looked and saw the dark cloud hanging over the waters, and he felt the cold wind come up from the river; moreover, the sight of the strange man terrified him. So, hearing his mother calling him, the little boy ran back to his home, leaving the old man by the river alone.

Many years after that time the little boy came again to the river; but he was not a little boy now,—he was a big, strong man.

"The river is the same," said he; "the wind is the same cold, cutting wind of ice, and the same black cloud obscures yonder shore. I wonder where the strange old man can be."

“I am he,” said a solemn voice.

The man turned and looked on him who spoke, and he saw a warrior clad in black armor and wielding an iron sword.

“No, you are not he!” cried the man.
“You are a warrior come to do me harm.”

“I am indeed a warrior,” said the other.
“Come with me across the river.”

“No,” replied the man, “I will not go with you. Hark, I hear the voices of my wife and children calling to me,—I will return to them!”

The warrior strove to hold him fast and bear him across the river to the yonder shore, but the man prevailed against him and returned to his wife and little ones, and the warrior was left upon the river bank.

Then many years went by and the strong man became old and feeble. He found no pleasure in the world, for he was weary of living. His wife and children were dead, and the old man was alone. So one day in those years he came to the bank of the river for the third time, and he saw that the waters had

become quiet and that the wind which came up from the river was warm and gentle and smelled of flowers; there was no dark cloud overhanging the yonder shore, but in its place was a golden mist through which the old man could see people walking on the yonder shore and stretching out their hands to him, and he could hear them calling him by name. Then he knew they were the voices of his dear ones.

“I am weary and lonesome,” cried the old man. “All have gone before me: father, mother, wife, children,—all whom I have loved. I see them and hear them on yonder shore, but who will bear me to them?”

Then a spirit came in answer to this cry. But the spirit was not a strange old man nor yet an armored warrior; but as he came to the river’s bank that day he was a gentle angel, clad in white; his face was very beautiful, and there was divine tenderness in his eyes.

“Rest thy head upon my bosom,” said

the angel, "and I will bear thee across the river to those who call thee."

So, with the sweet peace of a little child sinking to his slumbers, the old man drooped in the arms of the angel and was borne across the river to those who stood upon the yonder shore and called.

X.

FRANZ ABT.



ANY years ago a young composer was sitting in a garden. All around bloomed beautiful roses, and through the gentle evening air the swallows flitted, twittering cheerily.

The young composer neither saw the roses nor heard the evening music of the swallows; his heart was full of sadness and his eyes were bent wearily upon the earth before him.

“Why,” said the young composer, with a sigh, “should I be doomed to all this bitter disappointment? Learning seems vain, patience is mocked,—fame is as far from me as ever.”

The roses heard his complaint. They bent closer to him and whispered, "Listen to us,—listen to us." And the swallows heard him, too, and they flitted nearer him; and they, too, twittered, "Listen to us,—listen to us." But the young composer was in no mood to be beguiled by the whisperings of the roses and the twitterings of the birds; with a heavy heart and sighing bitterly he arose and went his way.

It came to pass that many times after that the young composer came at evening and sat in the garden where the roses bloomed and the swallows twittered; his heart was always full of disappointment, and often he cried out in anguish against the cruelty of fame that it came not to him. And each time the roses bent closer to him, and the swallows flew lower, and there in the garden the sweet flowers and little birds cried, "Listen to us,—listen to us, and we will help you."

And one evening the young composer, hearing their gentle pleadings, smiled sadly, and said: "Yes, I will listen to you. What have you to say, pretty roses?"

"Make your songs of us," whispered the roses, — "make your songs of us."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the composer. "A song of the roses would be very strange, indeed! No, sweet flowers, — it is fame I seek, and fame would scorn even the beauty of your blushes and the subtlety of your perfumes."

"You are wrong," twittered the swallows, flying lower. "You are wrong, foolish man. Make a song for the heart, — make a song of the swallows and the roses, and it will be sung forever, and your fame shall never die."

But the composer laughed louder than before ; surely there never had been a stranger suggestion than that of the roses and the swallows! Still, in his chamber that night the composer thought of what the swallows had said, and in his dreams he seemed to hear the soft tones of the roses pleading with him. Yes, many times thereafter the composer recalled what the birds and flowers had said, but he never would ask them as he sat in the garden at evening how he could

make the heart-song of which they chattered. And the summer sped swiftly by, and one evening when the composer came into the garden the roses were dead, and their leaves lay scattered on the ground. There were no swallows fluttering in the sky, and the nests under the eaves were deserted. Then the composer knew his little friends were beyond recall, and he was oppressed by a feeling of loneliness. The roses and the swallows had grown to be a solace to the composer, had stolen into his heart all unawares,— now that they were gone, he was filled with sadness.

“I will do as they counselled,” said he; “I will make a song of them,— a song of the swallows and the roses. I will forget my greed for fame while I write in memory of my little friends.”

Then the composer made a song of the swallows and the roses, and, while he wrote, it seemed to him that he could hear the twittering of the little birds all around him, and scent the fragrance of the flowers, and his soul was warmed with a warmth he had

never felt before, and his tears fell upon his manuscript.

When the world heard the song which the composer had made of the swallows and the roses, it did homage to his genius. Such sentiment, such delicacy, such simplicity, such melody, such heart, such soul, — ah, there was no word of rapturous praise too good for the composer now: fame, the sweetest and most enduring kind of fame, had come to him.

And the swallows and the roses had done it all. Their subtle influences had filled the composer's soul with a great inspiration, — by means like this God loves to speak to the human heart.

“We told you so,” whispered the roses when they came again in the spring. “We told you that if you sang of us the world would love your song.”

Then the swallows, flying back from the south, twittered: “We told you so; sing the songs the heart loves, and you shall live forever.”

“Ah, dear ones,” said the composer,

softly; “you spoke the truth. He who seeks a fame that is immortal has only to reach and abide in the human heart.”

The lesson he learned of the swallows and the roses he never forgot. It was the inspiration and motive of a long and beautiful life. He left for others that which some called a loftier ambition. He was content to sit among the flowers and hear the twitter of birds and make songs that found an echo in all breasts. Ah, there was such a beautiful simplicity,—such a sweet wisdom in his life! And where'er the swallows flew, and where'er the roses bloomed, he was famed and revered and beloved, and his songs were sung.

Then his hair grew white at last, and his eyes were dim and his steps were slow. A mortal illness came upon him, and he knew that death was nigh.

“The winter has been long,” said he, wearily. “Open the window and raise me up that I may see the garden, for it must be that spring is come.”

It was indeed spring, but the roses had not yet bloomed. The swallows were chattering in their nests under the eaves or flitting in the mild, warm sky.

“Hear them,” he said faintly. “How sweetly they sing. But alas! where are the roses?”

Where are the roses? Heaped over thee, dear singing heart; blooming on thy quiet grave in the Fatherland, and clustered and entwined all in and about thy memory, which with thy songs shall go down from heart to heart to immortality.

XI.

MISTRESS MERCILESS.



HIS is to tell of our little Mistress Merciless, who for a season abided with us, but is now and forever gone from us unto the far-off land of Ever-Plaisance. The tale is soon told; for it were not seemly to speak all the things that are in one's heart when one hath to say of a much-beloved child, whose life here hath been shortened so that, in God's wisdom and kindness, her life shall be longer in that garden that bloometh far away.

You shall know that all did call her Mistress Merciless; but her mercilessness was

of a sweet, persuasive kind: for with the beauty of her face and the music of her voice and the exceeding sweetness of her virtues was she wont to slay all hearts; and this she did unwittingly, for she was a little child. And so it was in love that we did call her Mistress Merciless, just as it was in love that she did lord it over all our hearts.

Upon a time walked she in a full fair garden, and there went with her an handmaiden that we did call in merry wise the Queen of Sheba; for this handmaiden was in sooth no queen at all, but a sorry and ill-favored wench; but she was assotted upon our little Mistress Merciless and served her diligently, and for that good reason was vastly beholden of us all. Yet, in a jest, we called her the Queen of Sheba; and I make a venture that she looked exceeding fair in the eyes of our little Mistress Merciless: for the eyes of children look not upon the faces but into the hearts and souls of others. Whilst these two walked in the full fair garden at that time they came presently unto an arbor

wherein there was a rustic seat, which was called the Siege of Restfulness; and here-upon sate a little sick boy that, from his birth, had been lame, so that he could not play and make merry with other children, but was wont to come every day into this full fair garden and content himself with the companionship of the flowers. And, though he was a little lame boy, he never trod upon those flowers; and even had he done so, methinks the pressure of those crippled feet had been a caress, for the little lame boy was filled with the spirit of love and tenderness. As the tiniest, whitest, shrinking flower exhaleth the most precious perfume, so in and from this little lame boy's life there came a grace that was hallowing in its beauty.

Since they never before had seen him, they asked him his name; and he answered them that of those at home he was called Master Sweetheart, a name he could not understand: for surely, being a cripple, he must be a very sorry sweetheart; yet, that he

was a sweetheart unto his mother at least he had no doubt, for she did love to hold him in her lap and call him by that name; and many times when she did so he saw that tears were in her eyes,—a proof, she told him when he asked, that Master Sweetheart was her sweetheart before all others upon earth.

It befell that our little Mistress Merciless and Master Sweetheart became fast friends, and the Queen of Sheba was handmaiden to them both; for the simple, loyal creature had not a mind above the artless prattle of childhood, and the strange allegory of the lame boy's speech filled her with awe, even as the innocent lisping of our little Mistress Merciless delighted her heart and came within the comprehension of her limited understanding. So each day, when it was fair, these three came into the full fair garden, and rambled there together; and when they were weary they entered into the arbor and sate together upon the Siege of Restfulness. Wit ye well there was not a flower or a tree or a

shrub or a bird in all that full fair garden which they did not know and love, and in very sooth every flower and tree and shrub and bird therein did know and love them.

When they entered into the arbor, and sate together upon the Siege of Restfulness, it was Master Sweetheart's wont to tell them of the land of Ever-Plaisance, for it was a conceit of his that he journeyed each day nearer and nearer to that land, and that his journey thitherward was nearly done. How came he to know of that land I cannot say, for I do not know; but I am fain to believe that, as he said, the exceeding fair angels told him thereof when by night, as he lay sleeping, they came singing, and with caresses to his bedside.

I speak now of a holy thing, therefore I speak truth when I say that while little children lie sleeping in their beds at night it pleaseth God to send His exceeding fair angels with singing and caresses to bear messages of His love unto those little sleeping children. And I have seen those exceed-

ing fair angels bend with folded wings over the little cradles and the little beds, and kiss those little sleeping children and whisper God's messages of love to them, and I knew that those messages were full of sweet tidings; for, even though they slept, the little children smiled. This have I seen, and there is none who loveth little children that will deny the truth of this thing which I have now solemnly declared.

Of that land of Ever-Plaisance was our little Mistress Merciless ever fain to hear tell. But when she beset the rest of us to speak thereof we knew not what to say other than to confirm such reports as Master Sweetheart had already made. For when it cometh to knowing of that far-off land,— ah me, who knoweth more than the veriest little child? And oftentimes within the bosom of a little, helpless, fading one there bloometh a wisdom which sages cannot comprehend. So when she asked us we were wont to bid her go to Master Sweetheart, for he knew the truth and spake it.

It is now to tell of an adventure which on a time befell in that full fair garden of which you have heard me speak. In this garden lived many birds of surpassing beauty and most rapturous song, and among them was one that they called Joyous, for that he did ever carol forth so joyously, it mattered not what the day soever might be. This bird Joyous had his home in the top of an exceeding high tree, hard by the pleasant arbor, and here did he use to sit at such times as the little people came into that arbor, and then would he sing to them such songs as befitted that quiet spot, and them that came thereto. But there was a full evil cat that dwelt near by, and this cruel beast found no pleasure in the music that Joyous did make continually; nay, that music filled this full evil cat with a wicked thirst for the blood of that singing innocent, and she had no peace for the malice that was within her seeking to devise a means whereby she might comprehend the bird Joyous to her murderous intent. Now you must know that it was the

wont of our little Mistress Merciless and of Master Sweetheart to feed the birds in that fair garden with such crumbs as they were suffered to bring with them into the arbor, and at such times would those birds fly down with grateful twitterings and eat of those crumbs upon the greensward round about the arbor. Wit ye well, it was a merry sight to see those twittering birds making feast upon the good things which those children brought, and our little Mistress Merciless and little Master Sweetheart had sweet satisfaction therein. But on a day, whilst thus those twittering birds made great feasting, lo ! on a sudden did that full evil cat whereof I have spoken steal softly from a thicket, and with one hideous bound make her way into the very midst of those birds and seize upon that bird Joyous, that was wont to sing so merrily from the tree hard by the arbor. Oh, there was a mighty din and a fearful fluttering, and the rest flew swiftly away, but Joyous could not do so, because the full evil cat

held him in her cruel fangs and claws. And I make no doubt that Joyous would speedily have met his death, but that with a wrathful cry did our little Mistress Merciless hasten to his rescue. And our little Mistress belabored that full evil cat with Master Sweetheart's crutch, until that cruel beast let loose her hold upon the fluttering bird and was full glad to escape with her aching bones into the thicket again. So it was that Joyous was recovered from death; but even then might it have fared ill with him, had they not taken him up and dressed his wounds and cared for him until duly he was well again. And then they released him to do his plaisir, and he returned to his home in the tree hard by the arbor and there he sung unto those children more sweetly than ever before; for his heart was full of gratitude to our little Mistress Merciless and Master Sweetheart.

Now, of the dolls that she had in goodly number, that one which was named Beautiful did our little Mistress Merciless love best.

Know well that the doll Beautiful had come not from oversea, and was neither of wax nor of china; but she was right ingeniously constructed of a bed-key that was made of wood, and unto the top of this bed-key had the Queen of Sheba superadded a head with a fair face, and upon the body and the arms of the key had she hung passing noble raiment. Unto this doll Beautiful was our little Mistress Merciless vastly behoden, and she did use to have the doll Beautiful lie by her side at night whilst she slept, and whithersoever during the day she went, there also would she take the doll Beautiful, too. Much sorrow and lamentation, therefore, made our little Mistress Merciless when on an evil day the doll Beautiful by chance fell into the fishpond, and was not rescued therefrom until one of her beauteous eyes had been devoured of the envious water; so that ever thereafter the doll Beautiful had but one eye, and that, forsooth, was grievously faded. And on another evil day came a monster ribald dog pup and seized upon the

doll Beautiful whilst she reposed in the arbor, and bore her away, and romped boisterously with her upon the sward, and tore off her black-thread hair, and sought to destroy her wholly, which surely he would have done but for the Queen of Sheba, who made haste to rescue the doll Beautiful, and chastise that monster ribald dog pup.

Therefore, as you can understand, the time was right busily spent. The full fair garden, with its flowers and the singing birds and the gracious arbor and the Siege of Restfulness found favor with those children, and amid these joyous scenes did Master Sweetheart have to tell each day of that far-off land of Ever-Plaisance, whither he said he was going. And one day, when the sun shone very bright, and the full fair garden joyed in the music of those birds, Master Sweetheart did not come, and they missed the little lame boy and wondered where he was. And as he never came again they thought at last that of a surety he had departed into that country whereof

he loved to tell. Which thing filled our little Mistress Merciless with wonder and inquiry; and I think she was lonely ever after that,—lonely for Master Sweetheart.

I am thinking now of her and of him; for this is the Christmas season,—the time when it is most meet to think of the children and other sweet and holy things. There is snow everywhere, snow and cold. The garden is desolate and voiceless: the flowers are gone, the trees are ghosts, the birds have departed. It is winter out there, and it is winter, too, in this heart of mine. Yet in this Christmas season I think of them, and it pleaseth me—God forbid that I offend with much speaking—it pleaseth me to tell of the little things they did and loved. And you shall understand it all if, perchance, this sacred Christmas time a little Mistress Merciless of your own, or a little Master Sweetheart, clingeth to your knee and sanctifieth your hearthstone.

When of an evening all the joy of day was done, would our little Mistress Merciless

fall aweary; and then her eyelids would grow exceeding heavy and her little tired hands were fain to fold. At such a time it was my wont to beguile her weariness with little tales of faery, or with the gentle play that sleepy children like. Much was her fancy taken with what I told her of the train that every night whirleth away to Shut-Eye Town, bearing unto that beauteous country sleepy little girls and boys. Nor would she be content until I told her thereof,—yes, every night whilst I robed her in her cap and gown would she demand of me that tale of Shut-Eye Town, and the wonderful train that was to bear her thither. Then would I say in this wise:—

At Bedtime-ville there is a train of cars that waiteth for you, my sweet,—for you and for other little ones that would go to quiet, slumbrous Shut-Eye Town.

But make no haste; there is room for all. Each hath a tiny car that is snug and warm, and when the train starteth each car swingeth soothingly this way and that way, this way and that way, through all the journey of the night.

Your little gown is white and soft; your little cap will hold those pretty curls so fast that they cannot get away. Here is a curl that peepeth out to see what is going to happen. Hush, little curl! make no noise; we will let you peep out at the wonderful sights, but you must not tell the others about it; let them sleep, snuggled close together.

The locomotive is ready to start. Can you not hear it?

“Shug-chug! Shug-chug! Shug-chug!” That is what the locomotive is saying, all to itself. It knoweth how pleasant a journey it is about to make.

“Shug-chug! Shug-chug! Shug-chug!”

Oh, many a time hath it proudly swept over prairie and hill, over river and plain, through sleeping gardens and drowsy cities, swiftly and quietly, bearing the little ones to the far, pleasant valley where lieth Shut-Eye Town.

“Shug-chug! Shug-chug! Shug-chug!”

So sayeth the locomotive to itself at the station in Bedtime-ville; for it knoweth how fair and far a journey is before it.

Then a bell soundeth. Surely my little one heareth the bell!

“Ting-long! Ting-a-long! Ting-long!”

So soundeth the bell, and it seemeth to invite you to sleep and dreams.

“Ting-long! Ting-a-long! Ting-long!”

How sweetly ringeth and calleth that bell.

“To sleep—to dreams, O little lambs!” it seemeth to call. “Nestle down close, fold your hands, and shut your dear eyes! We are off and away to Shut-Eye Town! Ting-long! Ting-a-long! Ting-long! To sleep—to dreams, O little cosset lambs!”

And now the conductor calleth out in turn. “All aboard!” he calleth, “All aboard for Shut-Eye Town!” he calleth in a kindly tone.

But, hark ye, dear-my-soul, make thou no haste; there is room for all. Here is a cosey little car for you. How like your cradle it is, for it is snug and warm, and it rocketh this way and that way, this way and that way, all night long, and its pillows caress you tenderly. So step into the pretty nest, and in it speed to Shut-Eye Town.

“Toot! Toot!”

That is the whistle. It soundeth twice, but it must sound again before the train can start. Now you have nestled down, and your dear hands are folded; let your two eyes be folded, too, my sweet; for in a moment you shall be

rocked away, and away, away into the golden mists of Balow!

“ Ting-long! Ting-a-long! Ting-long!”

“ All aboard!”

“ Toot! Toot! Toot!”

And so my little golden apple is off and away for Shut-Eye Town!

Slowly moveth the train, yet faster by degrees. Your hands are folded, my beloved, and your dear eyes they are closed; and yet you see the beauteous sights that skirt the journey through the mists of Balow. And it is rockaway, rockaway, rockaway, that your speeding cradle goes, — rockaway, rockaway, rockaway, through the golden glories that lie in the path that leadeth to Shut-Eye Town.

“ Toot! Toot!”

So crieth the whistle, and it is “down-brakes,” for here we are at Ginkville, and every little one knoweth that pleasant waking place, where mother with her gentle hands holdeth the gracious cup to her sleepy darling’s lips.

“ Ting-long! Ting-a-long! Ting-long!” and off is the train again. And swifter and swifter it speedeth, — oh, I am sure no other train speedeth half so swiftly! The sights my dear one sees! I cannot tell of them — one must

see those beauteous sights to know how wonderful they are !

“ Shug-chug ! Shug-chug ! Shug-chug ! ”

On and on and on the locomotive proudly whirleth the train.

“ Ting-long ! Ting-a-long ! Ting-long ! ”

The bell calleth anon, but fainter and evermore fainter ; and fainter and fainter groweth that other calling — “ Toot ! Toot ! Toot ! ” — till finally I know that in that Shut-Eye Town afar my dear one dreameth the dreams of Ballow.

This was the bedtime tale which I was wont to tell our little Mistress Merciless, and at its end I looked upon her face to see it calm and beautiful in sleep.

Then was I wont to kneel beside her little bed and fold my two hands, — thus, — and let my heart call to the host invisible : “ O guardian angels of this little child, hold her in thy keeping from all the perils of darkness and the night ! O sovereign Shepherd, cherish Thy little lamb and mine, and, Holy Mother, fold her to thy bosom and thy love ! ”

But give her back to me, — when morning cometh, restore ye unto me my little one!"

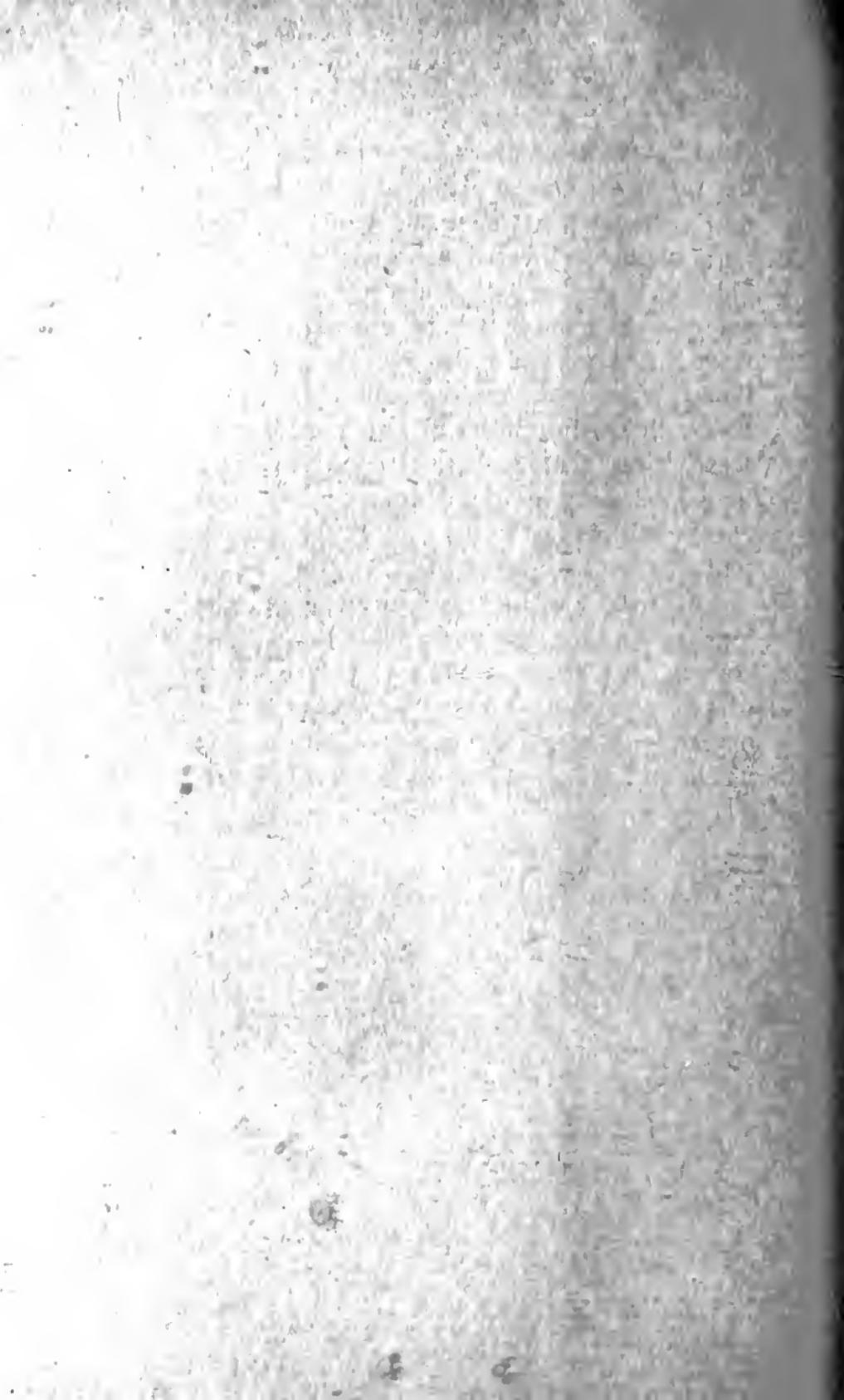
But once she came not back. She had spoken much of Master Sweetheart and of that land of Ever-Plaisance whither he had gone. And she was not afeared to make the journey alone ; so once upon a time when our little Mistress Merciless bade us good-by, and went away forever, we knew that it were better so ; for she was lonely here, and without her that far-distant country whither she journeyed were not content. Though our hearts were like to break for love of her, we knew that it were better so.

The tale is told, for it were not seemly to speak all the things that are in one's heart when one hath to say of a much-beloved child whose life here hath been shortened so that, in God's wisdom and kindness, her life shall be longer in that garden that bloometh far away.

About me are scattered the toys she loved, and the doll Beautiful hath come down all battered and grim, — yet, oh ! so very pre-

cious to me, from those distant years; yonder fareth the Queen of Sheba in her service as handmaiden unto me and mine,—gaunt and doleful-eyed, yet stanch and sturdy as of old. The garden lieth under the Christmas snow,—the garden where ghosts of trees wave their arms and moan over the graves of flowers; the once gracious arbor is crippled now with the infirmities of age, the Siege of Restfulness fast sinketh into decay, and long, oh! long ago did that bird Joyous carol forth his last sweet song in the garden that was once so passing fair.

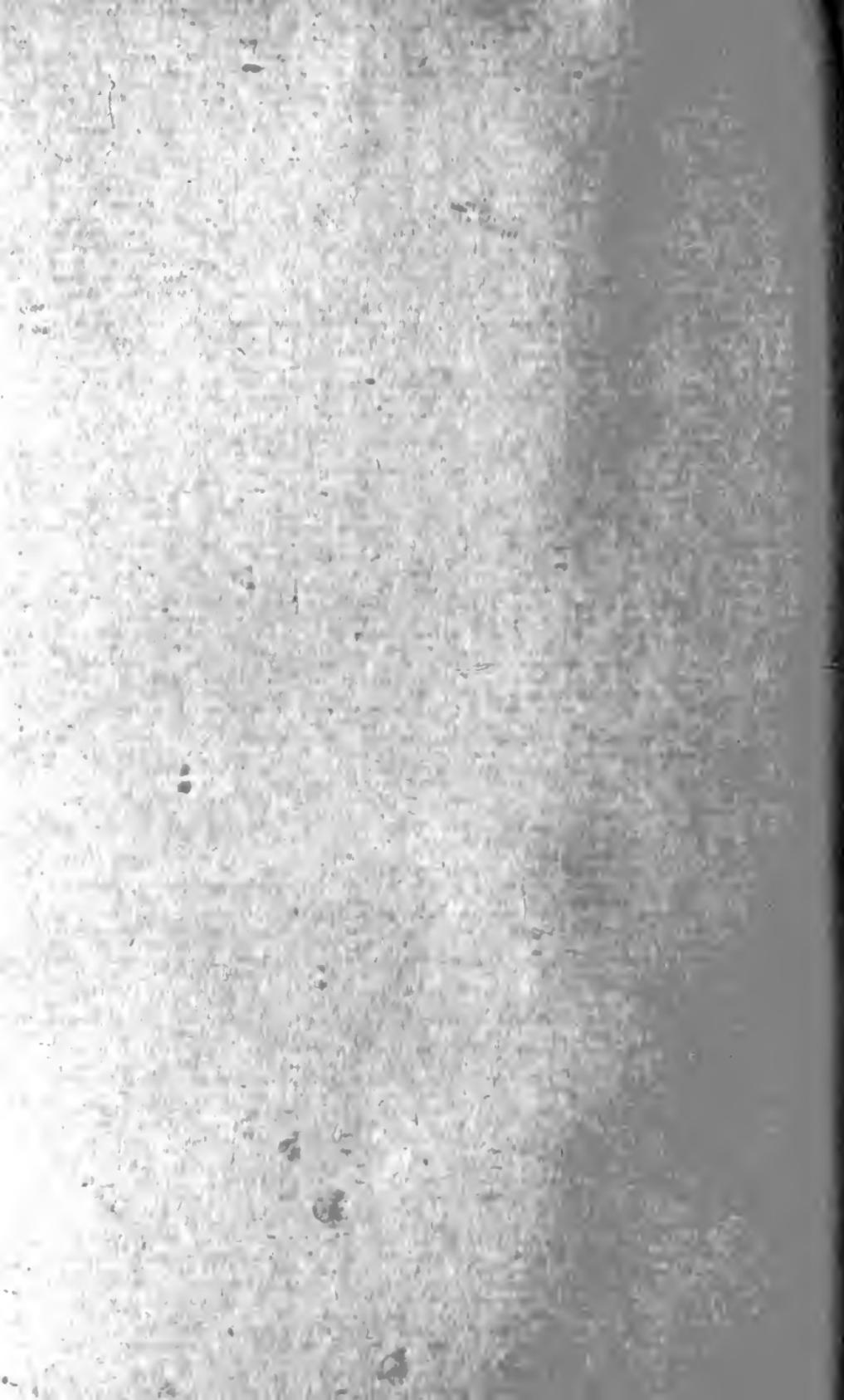
And amid it all,—this heartache and the loneliness which the years have brought,—cometh my Christmas gift to-day: the solace of a vision of that country whither she—our little Mistress Merciless—hath gone; a glimpse of that far-off land of Ever-Plaisance.



HERE endeth the book entitled . The Holy
Cross and other Tales . written by . Eugene
Field . and printed by John Wilson and Son
at the sign of . The University Press . in
Cambridge for . Stone and Kimball . the
publishers . of Cambridge and Chicago .:.









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